

Craniotomy: A Response to Martin Rhonheimer

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Introduction

THE ARGUMENT concerning the nature of craniotomy¹—whether it is a legitimate form of self-defense or is illegitimate, direct abortion—has been raging among Catholic moral theologians for more than a decade. Since the procedure in question is now “anachronistic” and “obsolete,” except in poorer countries, it may seem to some that this argument is relatively pointless. But the argument is in fact very important and relevant, because thinking through cases such as this helps us to be precise about what specifies moral acts and why certain acts are legitimately chosen whereas others are necessarily intrinsically wrong. In short, the dialogue can help us to define the first principles, which in turn help us to distinguish between what is morally good and what is morally evil. And in this way it can help us to make the right decisions in our own lives and to help others to do the same. What is at stake is not only the moral character of an obsolete medical procedure but the precise articulation of how the fundamental principles of morality apply to particular concrete situations that concern life and death. Martin Rhonheimer’s recent book *Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics: A Virtue Approach to Craniotomy and Tubal Pregnancies*² has contributed significantly to the scholarly discussion about craniotomy and morally evil acts, and it will certainly influence the course of the discussion for years to come. In this paper, however, we wish to propose that the conclusion that Rhonheimer draws concerning the

¹ A medical procedure which involves crushing the head of a child whose head is too large to fit through the birth canal in order to save the life of the mother.

² Martin Rhonheimer, *Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics*, ed. William E. Murphy Jr. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

nature of craniotomy, namely, that it is not intrinsically evil, is erroneous. We will begin by briefly mentioning some previous, significant contributions in the history of this conversation, beginning with St. Thomas's explication of what has become known as the principle of double effect. After outlining Rhonheimer's main argument, we will examine the essential elements that determine whether or not human actions are intrinsically good or evil. We will then point out how craniotomy differs from two other legitimate acts that cause the death of another human person, namely, the removal of a gravid fallopian tube during a tubal pregnancy and self-defense against an unjust aggressor. Finally, we will argue against Rhonheimer's conclusion that craniotomy is not intrinsically wrong.

Whether It Is Lawful to Kill a Man in Self-defense?

In the *Summa theologiae* II–II, q. 64, a. 7, St. Thomas answers the question as to whether it is ever permissible to kill a human person in an act of self-defense. He answers that it is sometimes permissible, and in the process of answering the question he articulates what has become known as “the principle of double effect.”³ The argument begins with the observation that “nothing hinders one act from having two effects, only one of which is intended, while the other is beside the intention.”⁴ St. Thomas proceeds to argue that an individual acting in self-defense can lawfully perform an action that in fact kills another man, so long as he intends not to kill the aggressor but only to repel his lethal attack. St. Thomas adds that lethal force can be used lawfully only if it is not more than is necessary, that is, only if there is no other way to save one's own life.

Perhaps more important than the particular conclusion of this article, however, is the major premise, one that has become the focus of much attention in recent years: “[M]oral acts take their species according to what is intended, and not according to what is beside the intention (*praeter intentionem*), since this is accidental as explained above (II–II, q. 43, a.3; I–II, q.72, a.1).”⁵

Could Craniotomy Be an Act of Lawful Self-defense?

In 2001, Germain Grisez, John Finnis, and Joseph Boyle Jr. published an article in *The Thomist* arguing that the moral species of the act of craniotomy is not intrinsically wrong, as it can be seen to be a legitimate act

³ In what follows, “the principle of double effect” will be shortened to “PDF”

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948), *ST* II–II, q. 64, a. 7.

⁵ *Ibid.*

of self-defense.⁶ They state that “the species of a human act, which settles the moral character of the act as good or bad, right or wrong, is not its species *in genere naturae* (in the order of nature) but its species *in genere moris* (in the order of human deliberating and choosing).”⁷ They take their cue from *Veritatis Splendor*, which is directly quoted in the article: “By the object of a given moral act, one cannot mean a process or an event of the merely physical order, to be assessed on the basis of its ability to bring about a given state of affairs in the outside world.”⁸ They imply that the intention of the acting person enters directly into the object of the act such that the object of the act cannot be defined apart from the intention, and in the case of craniotomy, the intention is to reshape the head of the child to save the life of the mother. Thus they conclude that craniotomy could be morally permissible and that it might not be truly described as the direct killing of an innocent child, since this is not what is intended. They argue that the act could correctly be seen to be the reshaping of the child’s skull for the purpose of saving the mother’s life, so that the death of the child is an unintended side-effect.

In a response to this article, Steven Long argued that just as “physicalism” is one extreme to be avoided, so is “angelism.”⁹ He states: “The essential matter of the act must always be included in the moral object, and is one—albeit only one—causal element in determining the moral species.”¹⁰ In other words, he argues that human acts are essentially form-matter composites, and that the essential matter cannot be excluded from the definition. Granted that the objects of moral acts are never merely of the physical order, they are almost always partially of the physical order—they are almost always essentially form-matter composites.

Three years later, Basil Cole, following this train of thought, also argued against the conclusion of Grisez and his co-authors.¹¹ He argues that the assertion that the crushing of the skull of a living human being is not an act of direct killing because it is not an “intended death-dealing action” is “counter to a realistic observation of and reflection on the facts of what is done regardless of intentions.”¹²

⁶ Germain Grisez, John Finnis, and Joseph Boyle, Jr., “‘Direct and Indirect,’” *The Thomist* 65 (2001): 1–44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸ *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 78.

⁹ Steven Long, “A Brief Disquisition Regarding the Nature of the Object of the Moral Act According to St. Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 45–71.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹ Basil Cole, O.P., “Is the Moral Species of Craniotomy a Direct Killing or a Saving of Life?,” *Nova et Vetera* 3, no. 4 (2005): 689–702.

¹² *Ibid.*, 698.

Martin Rhonheimer: Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics

Adding to this conversation, which has been joined by a number of moral theologians, Martin Rhonheimer took a somewhat unique stand in his *Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics*. In agreement with Long and Cole, but for different reasons, he too concludes that Grisez's argument is not sound. He explains: "It disregards the Catholic teaching that in such cases everything must be done to save the lives of mother and child, even if the mother must sacrifice her life so that her child will survive."¹³ However, like Grisez and his co-authors, Rhonheimer also comes to the conclusion that craniotomy can be employed as a legitimate act of self-defense under the principle of PDF.

This conclusion of Rhonheimer seems to be based on his answer to a fundamental moral question: what makes "the direct killing of an innocent person" intrinsically wrong? Rhonheimer sees that the act cannot be said to be intrinsically evil simply because it involves the physical act of direct killing, which can be legitimate when employed necessarily against an unjust aggressor. He also sees that the act is not intrinsically evil simply because it results in the death of an innocent person, which also occurs, for example, in the case of the permissible removal of a gravid fallopian tube during a tubal pregnancy. What then, precisely, makes this act intrinsically wrong? Rhonheimer draws this conclusion:

It is morally impermissible to weigh two lives against each other and to make a preferential choice. It is precisely this that seems to be the meaning of the Magisterium's condemnation of direct abortion, in which the death of the child is chosen as a means to the end of saving the mother's life, i.e., a decision is made, on the level of the choice of means, in favor of the mother and against the life of the child.¹⁴

Rhonheimer's position on craniotomy seems to be very complicated, but it is actually very simple. It amounts to this: The physically direct killing of innocent persons in vital conflicts is intrinsically wrong when the physical act depends ontologically on the preferential choice of ending one innocent person's life to save that of another, and the same physical act need not be intrinsically wrong when it does not depend ontologically on this unjust choice. Craniotomy does not depend on this unjust preferential choice. Therefore, craniotomy is not intrinsically wrong.

In arguing for this conclusion, Rhonheimer spends most of his time trying to establish the minor premise: craniotomy does not depend on

¹³ Ibid., 128.

¹⁴ Ibid., 122.

this unjust preferential choice. For example, he states, “Only if the fetus would otherwise survive could its death be said to be chosen as a means—and thus caused ‘directly’ in a morally relevant way. But in our case the death of the fetus is not willed to save the mother; as far as the life of the fetus is concerned, it is beyond any kind of willing.”¹⁵

Rhonheimer further argues that the death of the child is “a non-intentional side effect, and thus . . . a purely physical evil caused *praeter intentionem*.”¹⁶ The fact that the death of the child is not intended is shown by the fact that “one would not feel justified in performing the intervention if the child had a real chance of survival.”¹⁷

The Heart of the Question

In this brief survey of the debate, it is clear that all the participants are taking for granted the fact that direct abortion is intrinsically wrong. The question as to whether or not craniotomy is wrong depends entirely upon whether or not we equate it with direct abortion. All who argue for the legitimacy of craniotomy, therefore, do so by arguing that it is not direct abortion because the death of the child is not willed either as a means or as an end. Those who argue against the legitimacy of craniotomy, on the other hand, simply argue (rightly, in my opinion) that whatever is directly (i.e., physically) and knowingly performed enters into the nature of the act, and since the crushing of an innocent person’s skull is directly and knowingly performed in craniotomy, it is direct abortion.

If this were all there were to the argument, everything would simply depend on how the word “direct” is really defined. And this is in fact the primary question upon which all of the arguments have hinged. But even if it could be (or had been) established that when the Magisterium condemns the direct killing of innocent persons it is condemning the deliberate and *physically* direct killing of them, the question would nevertheless remain: why is this physical act intrinsically wrong?

Again, it is clear that the Church teaches that the killing of a human person is not always intrinsically wrong, for it is permitted in self-defense (under certain circumstances) against an aggressor.¹⁸ It is also clear that acts which cause the death of *innocent* human beings are not in and of themselves intrinsically wrong, for that too is permissible under certain

¹⁵ Ibid., 124.

¹⁶ Ibid., 125.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ CCC 2265: “Someone who defends his life is not guilty of murder even if he is forced to deal his aggressor a lethal blow.” *The Catechism* cites ST II–II, q. 64, a. 7, corp.

conditions, for example, the removal of the gravid fallopian tube in the case of a tubal pregnancy. So if it is true that (in the case of craniotomy) the physically direct act of killing an innocent human being, when his or her death is greatly lamented but known to be inevitable, is intrinsically wrong, is it possible to say concisely what the intrinsic disorder is, and why that disorder is not present in the other two permissible cases?

Rhonheimer argues that the disorder in the “direct killing of an innocent person” is only the unjust preferential choice of one life above another. We want to argue, however, that there is another disorder, even more fundamental than this one—one that is common to all intrinsically evil acts. Once we have articulated what it is, we can show that this disorder is present in craniotomy but not in the other two death-causing acts mentioned above. To begin, however, we must look more closely at what it is that makes intrinsically evil acts to be such.

Intrinsically Evil Acts

Every intrinsically evil act has an intrinsic disorder within itself, and it is therefore intrinsically irrational. This disorder is inherent to the act itself. It is not necessarily physical or relative to another human person. Servais Pinckaers sums up St. Thomas’s teaching on this matter quite nicely:

For St. Thomas, the moral quality of an action depends on two essential components: the ordering of the interior act, will or intention, to the end, and the ordering of the external act to its proper matter. Some acts are intrinsically evil in themselves by nature at these two levels, such as hating another and killing or torturing an innocent person. But in a single action, it suffices that the end willed or the matter of the act be evil in nature, to make the entire act evil, according to the principle, “*bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu*,” the deficiency being essential here.¹⁹

It should be clear enough to everyone involved in this conversation that the interior act must be properly proportioned to its proper end, all relevant facts being considered, in order for any human action to be morally good. Indeed, all the participants in this conversation seem to be in agreement about this. However, what is often less clear is how an exterior act might be disproportioned to its “proper matter” and why this might be relevant to determining the moral quality of a human action.

¹⁹ Servais Pinckaers, “A Historical Perspective on Intrinsically Evil Acts,” in *The Pinckaers Reader*, trans. Sr. Mary Thomas Noble, O.P., Craig Steven Titus, Michael Sherwin, O.P., and Hugh Connolly, ed. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 210.

Fortunately, however, St. Thomas gives some clear examples of what he means. To take just one of many examples, St. Thomas considers whether or not every lie (*mendacium*) is a sin (*peccatum*):

An action that is naturally evil in respect of its genus can by no means be good and lawful, since in order for an action to be good it must be right in every respect: because good results from a complete cause, while evil results from any single defect, as Dionysius asserts (*Div. Nom.* iv). Now a lie is evil in respect of its genus, since it is unnatural and undue for anyone to signify by words something that is not in his mind.²⁰

Once this principle has been articulated, it soon becomes clear that many actions which are known to be intrinsically wrong are wrong for precisely this reason: there is lack of due proportion between the action and that which the act bears upon. For example, it seems that every single one of the acts forbidden in the Ten Commandments is forbidden for the said reason: Do not worship as God what is not God. Do not use God's holy name as if it were profane (and the same principle applies to the Sabbath). Do not dishonor or disobey those to whom honor and obedience are due. Do not hate and consequently seek to harm or destroy what should be loved.²¹ Do not take for your own what is not your own. Do not speak falsehood as if it were the truth. Do not desire to take for your own what is not rightfully yours (or potentially rightfully yours).

It is not the intention, per se, nor the physical act, per se, nor the combination of the two, per se, that makes these acts intrinsically evil; it is an inherent disproportion between the action and the object²²—that is, an inherent disorder pertaining to the essential elements of the action itself. The same principle governs both components of the act. There must be due proportion between the interior act and its object, that is, the end, and there must be due proportion between the exterior act and its object, that is, that upon which the exterior act bears. Any deliberate act, for instance, adultery, which is judged to be intrinsically wrong/unjust, is such because

²⁰ ST II–II, q. 110, a. 3, c.

²¹ St. Thomas explains why killing an innocent person is intrinsically wrong: “If we consider a man in himself, it is unlawful to kill any man, since in every man, though he be sinful, we ought to love the nature which God has made, and which is destroyed in slaying him” (ST II–II, q. 64, a. 6).

²² The meaning of the word “object” depends on the kind of act about which one is speaking. The object of the interior act is the end. The object of the exterior act is an exterior thing. The object of the act of knowing is the thing known. The object of the act of loving is the thing loved. The object of choice is a certain action or a certain kind of behavior.

it itself contains a lack of due proportion between two or more of its essential components.

Another way of seeing the truth of the principle is by taking a virtue approach. What is it that primarily makes acts virtuous as opposed to vicious? It is clearly the same principle: It is a virtue to believe Truth Himself speaking and it is a vice to disbelieve Him. It is a virtue to love Goodness Himself supremely and it is a vice to love Him less than He deserves to be loved. It is a virtue to hope in the promised help of He who is omnipotent and it is a vice to despair of the same. It is a virtue to give to each what he is due and it is a vice to give less. It is a virtue to take nourishment according to the needs of the body and it is vice to take much more or less. It is a virtue to fear death as it should be feared and it is a vice to fear it much more or less. It is a virtue to consider what ought to be considered, for example, whether or not there is due proportion between our actions and their objects, and it is a vice to give less thought than is due.

To act morally is simply to act rationally. To act rationally is to conform our actions to the real order of things. To choose actions that are not proportioned to their objects is to act irrationally. Therefore, to act in that way is immoral.

How Craniotomy Differs from Two Other Death-Causing Acts

With this in mind, we must first *superficially* articulate how it is that craniotomy differs from the other two death-causing acts mentioned above: quite simply, that which the act of craniotomy bears upon is (a) a human person who is (b) not performing an action which is harmful. In craniotomy, the action of crushing the child's skull is the real and physically direct cause of the death of the child, but the child would not otherwise be the real cause of the death of the mother, for the child is not acting as an agent in any relevant, that is, lethal way.

In legitimate self-defense against an unjust aggressor, however, the defender performs (or can legitimately perform) an act which is the real and physically direct cause of the death of the unjust aggressor whose aggressive action would otherwise be the real cause of the death of the defender (or some other innocent person). The act of the defender is truly a defensive act against a true attack.

In the case of a tubal pregnancy also, where the baby is lodged in a gravid fallopian tube, it is permissible for the doctor to perform an act which is of its nature the *per accidens* cause of the death of the child. But in this case, the object of the exterior act is not the child; it is the gravid fallopian tube. That this act causes the death of the child is certainly true.

But precisely because (a) killing the child is not the object of the interior act, that is, the end, *and* because (b) the child himself or herself is not the object of the exterior act, that is, that which the act bears upon, the act itself is not that of killing. Whether or not the act is permissible is therefore determined by other considerations.

However, craniotomy differs from these legitimate death-causing acts in that the object of the exterior act (that which the act bears upon) is a person who can in no way be reasonably said to be attacking another. (This observation in and of itself says nothing about the morality of the act, because the irrationality of the act has not yet been demonstrated.) Though the interior act is truly defined primarily by the intention to save the mother's life, the exterior act is clearly that of killing a person who is not performing a life-threatening action. The act (craniotomy) cannot be accurately defined as an act of self-defense, because acts of this kind must meet two criteria: (a) the interior choice to act in a certain way must be brought into being *wholly* through the intention to defend one's life, and (b) the exterior act must be an act by which a real attack is thwarted. That being said, we have not yet made any statements or drawn any conclusions regarding the morality of craniotomy.

Why This Difference Makes All the Difference

Granting our distinction, our interlocutors might nevertheless ask (and have in fact asked many times) why this distinction matters. The act in question does not seem to be manifestly irrational in the way that worshipping as God what is not God clearly is. In other words, have we made any progress in answering Rhonheimer's fundamental criticism: "The only charge that can be leveled against [craniotomy] is that it is 'direct,' i.e., physically direct. But is this morally decisive?"²³ If craniotomy is intrinsically wrong, what, precisely, is the inherent disorder? What, precisely, makes it to be inherently irrational?

Consider the following answer: Craniotomy is intrinsically wrong because it is an act that treats a person who is neither evil (*malum*) in himself nor evil in relation to something else as if he or she were evil in one of those ways.

We recall St. Thomas's formulation of why killing the innocent is always wrong. Part of his reply may be controversial, but we are interested only in the uncontroversial principle that he articulates:

An individual man may be considered in two ways: first, in himself; secondly, in relation to something else. If we consider a man in himself,

²³ Rhonheimer, *Vital Conflicts in Medical Ethics*, 124.

it is unlawful to kill any man, since in every man, though he be sinful, we ought to love the nature which God has made, and which is destroyed in slaying him. Nevertheless, as stated above (A.2) the slaying of a sinner becomes lawful in relation to the common good, which is corrupted by sin. On the other hand the life of righteous men preserves and forwards the common good, since they are the chief part of the community. Therefore it is in no way lawful to slay the innocent.²⁴

Ignoring the question as to whether or not and/or under what circumstances it is lawful to kill sinners who corrupt the common good, we have a clear principle here: Individuals can rightfully be treated as evil only to the extent that they really are evil either in themselves or in relation to something else. To do otherwise is evidently immoral if it is agreed that moral actions must bear due proportion to their objects.

Now the question arises: in what way can a person be rightfully considered an evil in relation to someone or something else? To begin to answer this question, we must first take note of the fact that relations exist only between relatives, and there are only three kinds of relatives:

Things are "relative" (1) as double to half, and treble to a third, and in general that which contains something else many times to that which is contained many times in something else, and that which exceeds to that which is exceeded; (2) as that which can heat to that which can be heated, and that which can cut to that which can be cut, and in general the active to the passive; (3) as the measurable to the measure, and the knowable to knowledge, and the perceptible to perception.²⁵

Referring to this passage, St. Thomas observes: "According to the Philosopher (Metaph. V) every relation is based either on quantity, as double and half; or on action and passion, as the doer and the deed, the father and the son, the master and the servant, and the like."²⁶ (The relatives of the third class mentioned above are based on actions, for example, the measured and the measure are relatives based on the act of measuring.)

Knowing this, the next question to ask is, in what sense is it that a human person can be considered evil in a way that is relevant to deciding whether or not it is morally permissible to kill him or her (directly or indirectly, however that is defined)? It should be evident however, that there is only one thing that needs to be considered: the nature of his or her own actions.

²⁴ ST II-II, q. 64, a. 6.

²⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translation from *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), Bk.V, ch. 14, 1020b26-32.

²⁶ ST I, q. 28, a. 4. corp.

All human persons are in themselves good, which is why it is always intrinsically wrong to hate them, intend to harm them, or intend to kill them as such. Like all relatives, human persons can be considered to be evil only in relation to someone or something else either (a) based on their quantity or (b) based on their actions. But human persons evidently cannot be considered to be evil based on their quantity (for no quantity is by nature harmful, but only actions involving quantities, for example, eating double or treble what is sufficient for one's bodily needs), so a human person can be considered to be evil only in relation to someone or something else because of the nature of his or her actions. Therefore, the only question that remains is this: is the fetus performing an action that makes it a threat to the mother's life? And the answer is no.

Rhonheimer was right to see that the moral norm "it is always wrong to directly and deliberately kill an innocent person" is a kind of shortcut that requires further explanation. The norm itself does not explicate the moral disorder, and for this reason he was right to seek the more fundamental principle upon which the norm itself stands. But let us now attempt to articulate that principle. The norm is a short way of saying the following: Human persons are not evil either in themselves or in relation to something or someone else except when they act in ways that are sinful or in ways that are otherwise harmful to other human persons. Human persons, *qua* persons, are good and should be loved and treated accordingly. When human persons perform actions that are harmful, they can be treated as agents of harm to the extent to which they actually are agents of harm. But when human persons are not agents of harm in any respect, it is wrong to treat them as if they were; for example, it is wrong to act on them in such a way that is ultimately destructive of them. Killing is an act that destroys a human person and deprives him or her of the possibility of obtaining every other natural good. Therefore it is always wrong knowingly and deliberately to kill a human person who is "innocent" in the sense just explained. It is unjust in one of the most radical ways possible.

This somewhat long explanation of a rather concise moral norm should serve to clarify why choosing to perform acts which do in fact kill "innocent" persons is in fact unjust. Killing an innocent person is an act that treats a human person as if he or she were evil in himself or herself or evil in relation to others when he or she is not. It is an act by which a moral agent chooses to treat as evil what is not evil in any respect. It is therefore intrinsically wrong in itself and unjust to the person being acted upon. Craniotomy is, as a form-matter composite, a particular instance of this kind of behavior.

One still might be tempted to argue, nevertheless, that a person need not be performing a lethal action in order to be considered a lethal agent; he or she could rightfully be considered to be the real cause of death *qua* having a certain quality and/or place—in this case, having a head that is too large to fit through the birth canal and being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But, in addition to what has already been said, the following observation might be helpful. From “if *A* then *B*” and “if not *A* then not *B*” it is often inferred that *A* is a cause of *B*. But this is simply a common logical fallacy. In what sense could the child legitimately be considered the cause of the mother’s death? He or she is clearly not the final cause, which does not exist, or the formal cause—the separation of soul and body. Nor is the child the material cause of the mother’s death, that being the rupture of the birth canal. Nor is the child the efficient cause, as this requires action.²⁷ Therefore the child cannot be considered to be the cause of death in any way except equivocally. And for this reason, evil simply cannot be truly predicated of the child, but only of the tragic situation of which both mother and child are equally victims. Unfortunately, in this case, one cannot change the nature of the situation without killing the child, and that is precisely why it is so tragic. It is hard to understand why these events occur, and it is even harder to accept the fact that we can do nothing to change the nature of these situations without doing something wrong. But what more can be said?

As many of our interlocutors would agree, craniotomy cannot be considered an instance of legitimate defense according to the principle of double effect, because the exterior act itself cannot be accurately described as an act that flows from the intention to thwart a lethal agent. But neither can it for any other reason be permissible to choose to act on the child in a lethal way, because the child is not evil according to any consideration that conforms to reality. Deliberately choosing to take the child himself or herself as the object of one’s exterior act and acting in a way that by its nature causes the event that is the cause of the death of the child, who is (according to not one but every consideration) deserving of our love and protection, are intrinsically disordered and immoral. The act can be accurately described only as killing one innocent person in order to save another.

²⁷ The action that efficiently causes the death of both mother and child is the mother’s own inevitable birth contractions. Both the mother and the child are equally victims of the lethal ruptures that these contractions cause. It is clear however that this lethal action is in no way an act of the child.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see that human acts can and must be considered and evaluated as intrinsically right or wrong according to the inherent proportions existing between the essential components of both their interior and their exterior parts. It is the character of these inherent proportions themselves that determines the moral quality of human actions. Though the ordering of the interior act to that which is truly good is what most formally determines the moral quality of human actions, we have seen that due proportion between the exterior act and that which it bears upon is also essential for moral integrity. If what we have argued is correct, we can see that to be good, we cannot simply desire things which are objectively good, form good intentions, and well order our interior and exterior actions according to our intentions. We must also conform our exterior actions to objective reality. Whether or not human actions are good or bad is primarily (and finally) determined by whether or not both their interior and exterior parts conform to the real order of things. N-V