

Is Carter's Critique Relevant?

Carter's March rebuttal (*PSCF* 57 [2005]: 77) of my December letter (*PSCF* 56 [2004]: 309) illustrates the problem I attempted to address. I am not in the least surprised that the group he references found Mannoia's paper excellent: she punched the right evangelical buttons. It is universally acknowledged that matters where one is deeply involved are the most difficult to evaluate rationally. Pro-life is the current evangelical shibboleth, not to be challenged.

Carter taxes me with misinterpreting Mannoia's appeal to intuition. Perhaps, but she builds her case in part on our feeling that "embryos are indeed persons." This precisely parallels the feeling of slaveholders that Negroes were not persons, with all the consequent evils. While it is certain that attitudes motivate actions, they do not establish the morality of efforts. I take this to be a consequent of her statement. I stand by my criticism.

Carter then challenges my critique of equating having a history with being a person by bringing in values. One may claim that an entity with a history has a value, but it may also have a disvalue. If one is orthodox, he believes that Satan has a history. But the father of lies lacks positive value. Some things are intrinsically good; some, extrinsically good. Some share both types of value. There are similar evil characterizations. I fear Carter has not thought matters through.

In this connection, I am delighted that he could ascertain Mannoia's intent, writing: "... Mannoia means no more than this." He repeats this feat in his penultimate paragraph. I was restricted to the published text, for I lack the insight of the seer. I only tried to treat the statements honestly.

Carter arbitrarily dismisses my recognition that many, if not most, zygotes fail to implant. But if each zygote is a person, then God's purpose must be to multiply the number of souls in heaven (or limbo, depending on one's theology). Thus we may increase the number of such souls by expanding hES production, each new stem cell line producing a new eternal soul. The fact that unfertilized ova may be stimulated to mimic zygotes also bears on this, though Turner's syndrome (single X female), which Carter mentions, has a different etiology. May I suggest that the entire matter requires more careful thought?

Carter twists my quotation of Caiaphas in order to proclaim it nonsense. What he tries to make me argue is nonsensical. Why would I suggest, contrary to the passage, that Caiaphas was volunteering? The parallel is not the individual's choice of giving himself as Christ did — no embryo can do that — but of physicians and egg and sperm donors using embryos to produce benefits for others. Does not this match Caiaphas' claim that Jesus be sacrificed to benefit the nation?

I noted a factual error and Carter commented, "Apparently everyone but Siemens snoozed past that one! But did they?" immediately invoking the church fathers. I can make no sense out of this loaded language beyond the fact that I have not pronounced the evangelical shibboleth.

Carter's final charge is that I am too hard on a student, as if I gave Mannoia a grade. Are students not responsible for facts, for logic, for the consequences of their claims?

This does not require that every lapse result in failure. Still, when I read students' papers, especially the better ones, I called attention to problems. But I wonder if this is the real objection. Is the underlying difficulty that I have, behind Mannoia's text, noted the lacks in the pro-life underpinnings? Any challenge to dogma, real or imagined, produces strong reactions, rather like Carter's. But these areas, more than others, require rational analysis. Like it or not, we have to act on incomplete information. Instead of closing our minds, we should recognize the fallibility of our moral claims, even as we note that scientific laws are corrigible.

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Copernicus Clarified

It has been called to my attention that, in my recent review (*PSCF* 56, no. 4 [2004]: 299-300) of Owen Gingerich's volume *The Book Nobody Read: Chasing the Revolutions of Nicholas Copernicus*, I confused Copernicus with Tycho Brahe in stating that Copernicus advocated a *dual revolutionary* hypothesis whereby the planets revolved around the earth and the earth, in turn, revolved around the sun. In fact, Copernicus contended that *all* the planets revolved around the sun.

Further, my review stated incorrectly that Copernicus was a priest. This was not true in spite of the fact that he served as a canon of the cathedral at Frauenberg, Poland. Although, as a church administrator, there was the possibility that he would become the successor to his uncle, the bishop of the northern-most diocese of Poland, Copernicus made the decision to forego the priesthood and to turn his primary attention to the study of astronomy.

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A Call for Works in the Arts

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