

Will Power

Logical conclusions: According to Wesley Clark's existentialist metaphysics, most of us are not alive.

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Most pro-abortion politicians refuse to get drawn into the question of when life begins. That's a religious question, they say, and we can't really know for sure. That's why we should just leave it to the mother. (Though, logically, not knowing when life begins should be a reason for protecting it all the way through.)

But presidential candidate Wesley Clark, despite his relatively conservative reputation, has gone further than any of them in his support for abortion. He has gone beyond Roe vs. Wade, beyond any but the most radical pro-death theorists, whose philosophy he has embraced. Not only does he say that he believes in abortion till the moment of birth. Not only does he say that he would appoint no pro-life judges. He says that he does know when the fetus becomes a human being. As he told the Manchester (N.H.) Union Leader, "Life begins with the mother's decision."

The notion that the baby is not alive until the mother exerts an act of will is not original with Mr. Clark. The most radical feminist philosophers, *avant garde* ethicists, and anti-Christian theologians have been talking this way. In one version, a baby does not have the right to life until it has been "welcomed into the human community." This, of course, also allows for infanticide, which is part of the radical ethicists' agenda, allowing and justifying the killing of handicapped children who are not "welcomed" by the "community."

This ties in well to the rhetoric of "pro-choice." The assumption is that there are no objective moral criteria that apply to abortion. If a woman chooses to have a baby, that is right "for her." If she chooses to have an abortion, that is right for her. What makes something morally right is the act of choosing. Behind this postmodern approach to ethics is a whole metaphysical system known as existentialism.

In the first half of the last century, philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger concluded that, since there is no God, there is no meaning in life. Human beings, though, can create their own meaning by their decisions, by acts of the will. With no objective meaning, it does not matter what a person chooses. Some may choose Christianity. Sartre chose Communism. Heidegger chose Nazism. As long as the beliefs are freely chosen, they are valid for that person.

The same goes for morality. In his book *Saint Genet*, Sartre celebrated the life of a well-known criminal—a thief, liar, and sexual deviant—who, however, chose his moral code, living by his own rules in a way that, in Sartre's view, made him a saint.

There is an important corollary, though, in existentialist thought, which has a major bearing on Gen. Clark's application of this philosophy to abortion. Both Sartre and Heidegger believed that most people refuse to make these decisions for themselves. The masses of people simply drift along with what other people do, blindly conforming to their culture, letting others make the decisions for them. They live in what Sartre called “bad faith.” Heidegger called them “inauthentic.” They are not fully human.

This is why the existentialists and their heirs look down upon the “bourgeoisie,” the ordinary middle-class folks who follow the law, go to church, and accept an objective morality that they did not create for themselves. Existentialists value (and emulate) instead the nonconformist, the rebel, the bohemian who scorns “society's rules” and validates his “authenticity” by living by his own freely chosen code.

For Heidegger, the masses, lacking a true will of their own, can only become authentic by becoming one with the will of someone greater. Thus his advocacy of Hitler, who shared much of his philosophy. Heidegger believed that the majority of people, since they do not go along with existentialism, are not “authentic”; that is to say, they are not real. If they are not real, it is much easier to kill them, as Heidegger's fellow Nazis demonstrated. Since babies cannot make decisions, they are not real either.

This is actually how Gen. Clark and the “pro-choice” zealots think, the worldview that allows them to see nothing wrong with aborting children. Only those who do make decisions have a life that counts. This is also why “pro-choicers” nearly always believe in euthanasia, since the severely sick and handicapped often are also incapable of making decisions.

Existentialists love absurdity—they think all of life is absurd—but the absurdity of their own philosophy should be evident. For one thing, if “life begins with the mother's decision,” as Gen. Clark says, and, as his fellow existentialists believe, most women avoid such existentialist decisions—just growing up, falling in love, getting married, having a baby because that is where life takes them—then most people today must not be alive.