

Human Personhood: An Introduction

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The Importance of Bioethics

- 20th- and 21st-Century Tech Advances
- New Dilemmas:
 - Abortion legal in the US since 1973
 - Organ transplantation now very common
 - 1981: AIDS crisis began
 - Complex questions:
 - When does life begin?
 - When does death occur?
 - What is “Quality of Life” and “Sanctity of Life,” and how do they differ from each other?
 - When is medical care futile? Who owns the life that we each live?

What is Ethics?

- How should we define “ethics?”
- “Bioethics” simply means applying these principles to medical and biological issues

- **“Ethics” = rules for how persons should act towards one another**
- **Persons = members of the “moral community”**
- **So who is a “person?”**

- *Conception view of personhood:*
 - A human being is a person from the moment of conception and at every subsequent moment.
- *Human being = genetically human*
- *The “moment” of conception:*
 - *Fertilization (union of sperm and egg)*
 - *Syngamy (fusion of chromosomes)*
- *Every subsequent moment*
 - *Death only ends personhood for the bodily shell*
 - *As Christians, we hold to no true end of personhood*

Psalm 8

- 1 O LORD, our Lord,
**How majestic is Your name in all the earth,
Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!**
- 2 From the mouth of infants and nursing babes
You have established strength Because of Your adversaries,
To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.
- 3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
- 4 **What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?**

Psalm 8 (cont.)

- 5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!
- 6 You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
- 7 All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
- 8 The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.
- 9 O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name in all the earth!

Genesis 1

26 Then God said, “Let Us make man **in Our image, according to Our likeness**; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

27 **God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.**

28 God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

“image”

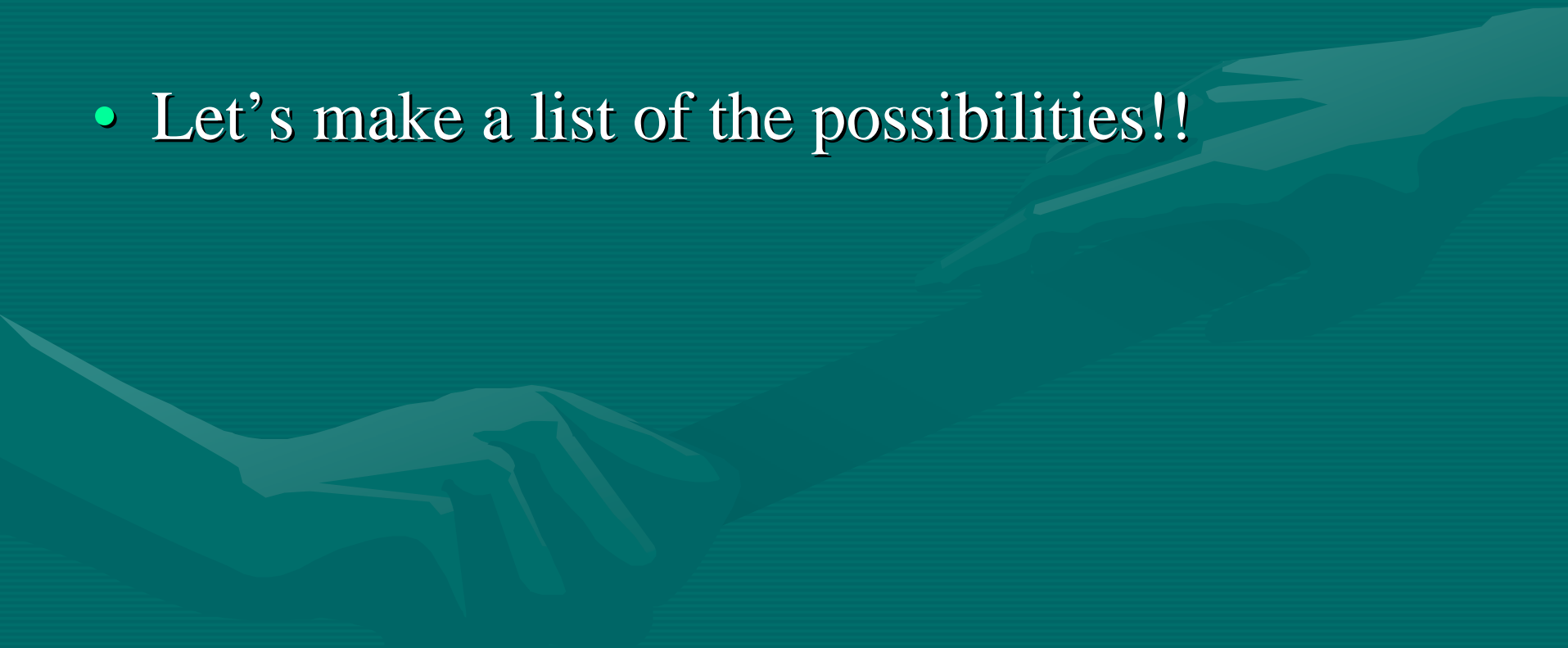
- From Hebrew word “tselem”
- sixteen times in OT, five = man as created in God’s image
- other cases, tselem = idol
- The root sense is that of a representation or resemblance

“likeness”

- comes from the Hebrew root “demûth”
- appears twenty-six times in OT, often with theophanies, or appearances of God
- Ezekiel and Daniel
- Most theologians: “image” and “likeness” are synonyms

The “Image of God”

- What does this mean?
- Let’s make a list of the possibilities!!



Summary of Views:

- *Structural views*: ways human nature is related to God's nature
- *Relational view*: social character of man in his ability to relate to God and others
- *Functional view*: emphasis is on man's stewardship over creation

Image of God: List of Characteristics

- *Structural*
 - *holiness*
 - *moral nature*
 - *creativity*
 - *rationality*
 - *volition*
 - *compassion*
 - *self-awareness*
 - *intellect*
- *Relational*
 - *communicates*
 - *makes friends*
 - *can relate to God*
 - *social skills*
- *Functional*
 - *“imager” of God*
 - *fulfills stewardship role*

What is the Danger Here?

Image of God: List of Characteristics

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MIND GAMES
on the IMAGE OF GOD:
Taking Apart a Car





MIND GAMES **on the IMAGE OF GOD:**

Taking Apart a Person

(volunteer, please?)

The Image of God is Intrinsic

- Inseparable from humanness
- Not like an automobile:
 - 1957 Chrysler
 - cp. with a person
- A person is more than a “pile of parts”

Image of God: Summary

- IOG = *ontological* correlation with the Divine nature
- Man is a representation of God, though not equal to God
- Human personhood is *intrinsic*, part of being human
- There is no such thing as a “human non-person”

Argument from continuity:

- If persons are not cars, then not defined by their parts
- Cells of the human body constantly replaced
- All of the chemical parts completely replaced every few years.
 - Yet persons have continuity
 - Same person as one week ago, one year ago, or ten years ago
 - Memories give continuity with present state
- Example of Timothy McVeigh

Applications to the Unborn

- Common sense and continuity arguments
- Francis Schaeffer
 - If a baby is a person . . .
 - How about one minute earlier?
- No *prima facie* (prima FACE-ya) reason to assume that a baby changes its essential nature by virtue of geography
- No *prima facie* reason not to extend such humanity further back in time

Personhood and Our Society

- Early Abortion
- RU-486
- “Emergency Contraception”
- Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research
 - from “left over” embryos from IVF
 - from cloning
- Utilitarianism and Modern Society
 - The deontological to utilitarian shift in bioethics
 - The end justifies the means
 - Loss of societal respect for persons

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