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“BIOGRAPHICAL LIVES” REVISITED AND EXTENDED

ABSTRACT. After reviewing the history, rationale, and Jim Rachels’ varied uses of the notion of biographical lives, the essay further develops its social dimensions and proposes an ontological analysis. Whether one person is leading one life or more turns on the number separate social worlds he or she creates and maintains. Furthermore, lives are constituted by narrated events in a story. Lives, however, are not stories, but rather are extended “verbal objects,” that is, “narrative objects” with a hybrid character, both linguistic and by inference non-verbal. In this they are like facts, propositions, and histories, grasped only through their verbal expression. Being narrative and socially embedded, lives can arguably be extended beyond the death of the principal liver of a life by the commemorative actions of those who shared it. Jim hoped to persuade doctors to shift from a traditional Sanctity of Life principle to a Sanctity of Lives principle. Accordingly, they could stop pointless prolongation of biological life once a patient permanently loses consciousness, his criterion of the end of a biographical life. It might seem that allowing lives to be extended past that point or death would forego that clinical benefit, but that is not so.

KEY WORDS; biographical lives, James Rachels, multiple lives, narrative objects, post-mortem harms and benefits, Sanctity of Life, withdrawing treatment.

At his father’s funeral Stuart Rachels said that Jim had died with no philosophic projects unfinished. There was one. Two months before his death Jim and I spoke of our need to review the notion of “biographical lives.” We had used it over the years but without the analysis or broadening it needed to bear the weight we were giving it. Much of what follows is what I might have sent Jim, had he lived longer. I think he would have welcomed some of these remarks, resisted others, and clarified all of them.

The agenda is as follows: First, an account of the early rationale and use of the distinction between biographical lives and biological life; secondly, social criteria for individuating and identifying lives, and the relation of lives, persons, and personhood; thirdly, the narrative features of lives and their ontological status as “narrative objects”; fourthly, post-mortem harms and ways to extend lives beyond death; and finally, clinical implications of such extended lives and misgivings.

ORIGINS

The notion of “biographical lives” began to take shape in an NYU course I began giving in the late-60’s called, “Life and Death.” The title was misleading in that an aim of the course was to retire these general terms and the general questions they inspired. Along with *élan vital* they already had been dropped from Biology, thanks to negative entropy, chemical evolution, and other scientific closures of the gap between animate and inanimate. But in ethics and metaphysics Life and Death still had major roles, often supported by immaterial Souls of infinite intrinsic worth. Was there a way akin to their scientific deflation to reduce their activity in these areas?

One deflationary means was syntactical, namely, a downshift from upper-case singular terms to lower-case plurals, from capitalized ‘Life’ and ‘Death’ to ‘lives’ and ‘deaths.’ This was not meant to be a conceptual reduction, but redirected attention from Life and Death on the grand, universal scale to specific lives and deaths. Capital ‘D’ Death may be a Grim Reaper without regard for the age, condition, or status of its victims, but we are more selective in our killings and responses to deaths in varying circumstances. The differences among assassinations, suicides, executions, wartime massacres, euthanasias and abortions matter greatly in how we react to and assess these deaths. It matters further how a specific death fits the particular life it ends. Seppuku and drug overdose are different deaths, and so, too, the suicide of a teenager and the suicide of his terminally ill grandfather. The philosophic task was to give an ethical and metaphysical account of such differentiated lives and deaths, unfettered by thoughts about “the Meaning of Life,” the “Evil of Death,” or the relation of Body and Soul.

A first step was to find a rubric for such differentiated lives and deaths. “Biographical lives” seemed most suitable, drawing as it does on the ancient Greek bios (βίος)¹—the course of life, manner or means of living, and livelihood. The contrasting Greek term was zoê (ζωέ), used in speaking of generating, preserving, and protecting animal life.² But for the distinction in mind “biological life,” similarly rooted in bios, seemed better than “zoological life” for two reasons. First, the distinction was not meant to mark a conceptual chasm, for the biographical and the biological are interwoven. Biological events are among the most salient and consequential features of our lives; our lives are constrained by biological life-cycles. Moreover, “zoological life” would prejudice the question as to whether some non-human animals had biographical lives, a question to which Jim had an increasingly settled positive answer. I was less certain, since an answer turned on what conceptual capacities one required for having a life and that seemed indeterminate.

Jim presented his views on animal lives several years later.³ Like the earlier course, the book was misnamed, for Jim’s aim was similarly to shift physicians’ attention from the end of (biological) Life to the end of biographical lives. This aim was also misportrayed on the cover by a flat electrocardiogram, rather than a flat *electroencephalogram*—a sign of permanent loss of consciousness, and hence loss of a biographical life and its goods. On his view the only value of biological life was instrumental, being necessary for biographical life. So, once biographical life was over, biological life could be ended without loss of any goods, present or possible. To prolong mere biological life would, he thought, be seen to be a waste of medical and financial resources.

¹ In Liddell and Scott’s abridged *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1953), p.130.

² *Ibid.* pp.299-300. Thus, ζῳϊκός of or for animals; ζωογόνος producing animals; life-giving; ζῳον. a living being, animal.

³ James Rachels, *The End of Life: Euthanasia and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

In allowing or helping a patient die, physicians would admittedly be violating the traditional, quasi-religious Sanctity of Life Principle, but not the Sanctity of *Lives* Principle with which Jim hoped to replace it. This latter principle had the advantage of needing no divine endorsement or source, for the value of such a life was self-evident: Lives are the “sum of all we hold dear: our projects, our activities, our loves and friendships, and the rest.”⁴

Moreover, unlike the Sanctity of Life Principle, a Sanctity of *Lives* Principle can explain common discriminations regarding killings and the deaths of various forms of non-human life. On Jim’s view, rhesus monkeys, for example, have lives: They “live together in social groups; they have families and care for one another; they communicate with one another.”⁵ Accordingly, to kill one is a serious matter in that it thereby deprives one of these present and future goods, although it is not as serious as killing persons whose lives have the greater goods that come with more intellectually and emotionally complex lives. The principle’s protectiveness varies with the complexity of the life in question: As lives become simpler, the principle’s protection weakens, “until we reach the clams and snails and bugs whose ‘lives’ count for little.” The quotation marks are meant to convey the irony of allowing such creatures to have lives at all, given that they have none of the rudiments of “the conceptual wherewithal” needed for a biographical life. Hence they don’t have lives to count, not even “for little.” If they are to have any protection whatsoever, it would presumably have to come from some principle that involves no gradations or ranking of life-forms, such as the Sanctity of Life Principle Jim wants physicians and others to reject

Far more pressing is the question, What protections does Jim’s revised principle provide severely disabled newborn children? He thinks none –an answer which he

⁴ James Rachels, *Created From Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) p.199.

⁵ Rachels, *The End of Life*, p.33.

recognizes to be disturbing. As I will explain later, I think that his principle might give such children some protection, but if not, it is more limited than Jim realized.⁶

Here I want to suggest a different kind of limit: Jim's principle is, I think, wrongly formulated as a sanctity principle. I associate sanctity or the sacred with taboos or prohibitions which seriously constrain our usual practices, even to the point of forbidding contact to all but special delegates. There may be some gradations among the sacred (as in "the holy of holies") but even the least sacred demands high restraint and respect, given the elevated moral authority from which sanctity derives. Jim's principle makes no such demands, given that it allows the ranking of lives and the sacrifice of lower-ranked to higher-ranked lives in case of unavoidable competition.

For this reason, I think Jim's principle is better regarded as a principle of *Respect for lives*. Respect takes various forms and degrees. Moreover, respect can be won or lost. Even if, as Jim says, all people value their own lives equally, not all lives are worthy of equal respect. Indeed, we have no compunctions about trying to end certain lives, for example, lives of crime or unintentional self-destruction. The hope is to replace such lives by new lives better for both the liver and his or her associates—the rehabilitative goal of penal and/or psychiatric institutions.

Moreover, Respect rather than Sanctity better fits the arguments we later made in a joint paper for a conference on Autonomy. We invoked biographical lives to explain why in the liberal tradition we value Liberty as much as we do.⁷ It is not that Liberty is sacred in virtue of whatever intrinsic or instrumental value it may have, but rather that it is integral to a biographical life.

⁶ I will suggest below how some abiographical beings, namely human infants with severe congenital disabilities, may be entitled to protection under Jim's principle, contrary to Jim's own view.

⁷ James Rachels and William Ruddick, "Lives and Liberty." in the proceedings of the conference organized and edited by John Christman, *The Inner Citadel: Essays on Individual Autonomy* (Oxford University Press 1989).

We took as support for this strong claim certain accounts of the condition of slaves in certain systems of slavery, historical and fictive. On one comprehensive survey, slaves are said to be routinely “socially dead persons: in virtue of being “genealogically isolated” from parents and any children they might have.⁸ On another account of Trojans enslaved by Greeks, slaves are deprived of the capacity for love or gratitude except that directed toward their masters: “One cannot lose more than the slave loses, he loses all inner life.”⁹ We combined these claims to say that such extreme slaves have no lives of their own, inner or outer, but are completely incorporated within the lives of their masters as mere factotums.

This was, in fact, not true of many slaves. As we know from slave narratives and the novels they inspired, many slaves in the ante-bellum South did manage, or were allowed, to have liberties enough “from sundown to sunup” to make lives of their own, however tenuous. These lives significantly included hopes, often falsely fostered by their masters, that they might one day be freed and reunited with family members who had been sold away.¹⁰ Along with such specific hopes was the more general hope for eventual personhood that manumission might bring, that is, hope for social regard and respect.

Although such social regard might presuppose liberty, we thought it important to distinguish personhood, socially understood, from having a life (“lifelike”?)

⁸ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1982)

⁹ Simone Weil, *The Iliad or The Poem of Force: A Critical Edition*, James P. Holoka, ed. (New York: Peter Lang 2003)

¹⁰ I have come to think that hope is as central to biographical lives as liberties as is Liberty--a thought in part prompted by the title of a lecture Bernard Williams to a medical audience, “Where there’s hope, there’s life.” Williams sometime joked about our “biosserie,” but was willing to engage in it himself from time to time.

Personhood is morally more demanding, requiring equal treatment in whatever sphere of social life it mattered—most notably, the legal and religious. As “members of the moral community,” “rational ends in themselves,” or “God’s creatures,” persons have in common with others the traits relevant to personhood, whatever their differences in other desirable traits such as property-holding or education. By contrast, *livers of lives* need no such equal standing or respect. Since lives are defined largely by social activities and relationships, *livers of lives* do require in addition to certain liberties, not equal regard but rather social *acceptance*. But that acceptance need not be acceptance as an equal. Many lives (like those of traditional wives) are subordinate to other lives, but short of the complete subordination of slaves. . . .

Such social acceptance helps define and distinguish one life from another. Consider Jim’s examples of people with two lives--the bigamist who leads two lives simultaneously and the woman who leads two lives serially, by forswearing the life of a Miami prostitute for that of a Los Angeles boutique proprietor.¹¹ Each takes pains to keep their two lives geographically and socially separate lest discovery undermine one or both lives. This is not just a reasonable fear or practical requirement: it is this creation of two distinct social worlds that makes them two lives, not just one complex life with two parts. Contrast the secretive bigamist with the proud Mormon husband who publicly combines his two families in neighboring houses, or even the same house.¹² Likewise, compare the secretive bicoastal woman with a prostitute who becomes politically or religiously active on behalf of her former sex co-workers. For her, her past gives meaning and authority to her current advocacy or proselytizing. Arguably, in both cases, there is a single complex life in virtue of their living openly in a single world of social relationships.

¹¹ Rachels, *End of Life*, pp.53-54.

¹² Among public figures, the contrast is between Charles Lindbergh with two families in America and France, and Louis Kahn, whose several families knew of one another’s existence and occasionally interacted.

These social criteria for individuating lives are akin to Jim's insights on privacy.¹³ We need control over what is known about us and by whom, he claimed, if we are to maintain distinct social relationships and act appropriately in each. We must be able for the sake of friendship to reveal personal information that we withhold from professional associates. Or, if we are to be able to remain properly formal with professional clients or colleagues, they must not see us horsing around with our children. The steps from such common privacy concerns to the leading of multiple lives are not many or great. Think of a scholar who tells a friend but not her colleagues of her unpublished detective novel, but then with the success of its publication under a pen name she rents a summer cottage in a village where she is known only as the author of subsequent novels under that name.

NARRATIVE FEATURES OF LIVES

In addition to persons with double lives or a single life with distinct parts, there are those hapless persons, like Keats and Mozart whose lives are truncated half-lives, cut short by premature deaths. Lamenting the incompleteness of his life at 26, Jim said of the Cambridge logician, Frank Ramsey, "It was as though a story was only half-told; we had the beginning, and intimations of the middle, but no idea of what the ending might be."¹⁴ Whether Ramsey's life, if longer, would have had a full narrative shape is, of course, unknowable. It might have fallen into disarray, as may even those lives aspiring to be literary works of art. Few people have the resources, single-mindedness, or good fortune to even try to so shape their lives. They are more like those anti-heroic figures in 18th century picaresque novels whose episodic encounters have little pattern, but are determined mostly by happenstance. Indeed, some lives may

¹³ James Rachels, "Why Privacy is Important," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 4:4 (1975) pp.323-333.

¹⁴ Rachels, *The End of Life*, pp.50-51

be so subject to chance (or dementia) that only Beckett or Joyce or some absurdist author could recount them.

Even those lives, however, do have along with more coherent lives at least two narrative features. They lend themselves to retrospective illumination and revision, later events leading to redescription of earlier events. In some instances, later events reveal aspects unnoticed or concealed earlier. (“Her initial coldness was a disguise of her true feelings.”) In other instances, a later outcome shows an earlier action to have been shrewd, lucky, prescient, overoptimistic, foolish, and so forth. A related narrative feature is the ways in which we describe events so as to bring out their causal and/or explanatory connections. We have a large repertory of conceptually linked cause-and-effect pairs of terms, like ‘insult’ and ‘anger,’ ‘anger’ and ‘blow,’ and ‘blow’ and ‘injury.’ So described, we understand without further detail why one event caused what it did, unlike cases of chance where cause and effect cannot be so described.¹⁵ From such pairs we can often construct long causal chains and patterns that can give lives at least some coherence and meaning.

Given these selections, descriptions, and constraints, we might well think that causal chains are created, not traced, or that revision is not a revealing discovery but an imposed spurious teleological order read into, not read from a life. But I reject the implied opposition between reading into and reading from. It belongs to the all too familiar alternatives philosophers usually give us: objective properties or semantic projections, discovery or invention, and so on. There may be a third alternative, an amalgam, hybrid, or middle state. I want to try to sketch that ontological possibility for lives.

We are often indifferent to drawing or using distinctions between what happens and our account of it. For example, we say without confusion or apology

¹⁵ For a fuller account of this explanatory “causal congruity”, see my “Causal Connection,” *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, v.IV (Dordrecht: D.Reidel 1969) pp.419-41.

things like, “Boswell’s life of Dr. Johnson celebrates both his wit and his life” and “Dower’s book on the U.S. occupation of Japan¹⁶ is the fullest and most accurate history we are likely to have of that period of Japanese history.” No doubt our first thought will be that context disambiguates two senses of ‘history’ and ‘life’ in play here. Surely, we are simply abbreviating the explicit thought that Boswell’s biography of Dr. Johnson celebrates the life Johnson lived, or that Dower’s historical account is the best we are likely to have of the historical events of the period.

But why are we so quick to charge words or our usage with ambiguity? Rather than our using ambiguous words or using them ambiguously, could it be that they and our use can be understood as recognizing or reflecting the ontological oddity or hybrid character of what we are talking about? Could it be that the distinction between lives as lived and lives as narrated reflects two categorial aspects of lives in a univocal sense? Admittedly, the two aspects belong to the different categories of *event* and *description*, but that means that lives cannot be adequately categorized as simply one or the other. The term ‘a life’ can be thought of as bridging two categories, or as referring to a categorial hybrid. So, too, for the term ‘history,’ a univocal term for a more extensive set of connected events both enacted and narrated.

Such semantic/objective border-crossings are common and often a matter of indifference; for example, facts, ideas, data, evidence, and propositions (in the ordinary sense). In the case of facts, for example, we speak of both discovering and misreading them, of exposing them and stating them accurately, of their being true of things and being the basis of truths, of arranging and phrasing facts so that they may speak for themselves. But, of course, the facts don’t speak except through our statements of them. As it is sometime put, facts are “sentence-like slices of reality.”

To keep this complexity (not ambiguity) in mind, let us call these hybrids “verbal objects,” by way of analogy with visual objects and numerical objects. *Visual* objects

¹⁶ John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: Norton 1999).

are not *visible* objects that may be seen as well as heard, felt, or smelt, but rather are objects known *only* through sight and by means of their visual properties, even though other non-visual properties may be inferred or attributed to them. (Rainbows and mirror images are *visual* objects, while raindrops and the objects reflected in mirrors are visible objects.) Visual objects are a member of the larger class of sensuous objects, that is, objects accessible only through a certain sense: aromas, sounds, tastes, tingles.

For such sensuous objects, the usual contrast between object and perception seems to collapse into the ontologically hybrid category of “object-as-perceived.” So too, for verbal objects, that is, objects that can only be apprehended, expressed, referred to or talked about in verbal form, that is, as objects-as-verbally-expressed. This is a matter of epistemic access, not of ontological identity. So, a single verbal object may have more several non-synonymous expressions, some known to be more accurate, full, or precise than others without direct comparison of expression and some non-verbal counterpart. Just so, we do not have to have access to numbers to know that of two numeral expressions for the same number, ‘6’ is less precise and, in some circumstances less accurate than, say, ‘6.01’.

Arguably, we can regard history and lives as “verbal objects,” or in view of their larger temporal scope, let’s call them “narrative objects.” In living, most people create lives that have a structure and content that can only be grasped through narrations, more or less detailed, selective, and dramatically organized. Admittedly, we on occasion talk about lives as if they had more important non-narrative properties—life is compared to a rich feast or spare meal, a piece of harmonious or discordant music, a journey or treadmill, and so on. I am not claiming that lives have only narrative properties, but rather that these are the properties by which they are best grasped and presented.

Jim agreed, or would have agreed, with these remarks on the social criteria for single complex lives and double lives, as well as the distinction between personhood as social regard and “lifelikehood” as social acceptance. An avid cinephile, Jim would I think like the idea of lives having a narrative structure expressed in recountings of that life. Of course, as a remarkably lucid thinker and writer, he would want a more perspicuous account of narrative objects, but their somewhat vague or hybrid ontological status would not have been his main objection. What he would surely have resisted is a possibility I now wish to draw from the narrative and social character of lives, namely, that lives can be extended beyond death. It would seem to defeat his aim to revise physicians’ end-of-life practices, but I think that’s not so.

With Thomas Nagel and others,¹⁷ Jim held that during our lifetimes harms may befall us of which we have no knowledge—for example, being betrayed by a friend or slandered by an enemy. Only hedonists who mistakenly think that all harms are painful experiences could think otherwise. But if there can be such unexperienced harms during our lifetime, why not post-mortem harms as well? Jim approvingly quotes Philippa Foot’s comment on Nietzsche: “Few philosophers can ever have suffered more than Nietzsche those special misfortunes that may come to a man after his death.” She was speaking of his sister’s distorting publication of parts of his Nachlass to serve an anti-Semitism he loathed.¹⁸

My difficulty with post-mortem harms so explained is simple, perhaps too simple. To speak of harms befalling or happening to someone implies that he or she is made worse off, even if never having any inkling of loss. But with death we are not just insensate; we are *absent* and so unavailable for such subtle effects to befall,

¹⁷ Thomas, Nagel, “Death” in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979) pp. 1-10.

¹⁸ Quoted in Rachels, *The End of Life*, p. 56 from Foot’s review essay, “Immoralist,” *New York Review of Books*, 17 February 1966, p. 8.

however unnoticed. A similar objection applies to description of post-mortem events as either “frustrating” or “satisfying” the deceased’s pre-mortem desires.

Is there anything that might substitute for the absent Nietzsche as the proper subject of such post-mortem harms and benefits? A possible postmortem surrogate Nietzsche’s reputation, something that began well before his death and which continued to grow after his death. Subject to pre-mortem harms he did not learn of, it was just as vulnerable to poster-mortem harms he could not learn of.

On reflection, however, his reputation has a serious shortcoming: it is subject not only to harms but to wild inaccuracies and often rapidly and arbitrary shifting opinions and tastes. A suitable surrogate would be less like the wind and like the man himself. Some philosophers have advanced a Narrative theory of the Self, identified as an autobiographer, or with the self-identifying and self-presenting stories we construct.¹⁹ This narrative self will not itself serve as a post-mortem surrogate, because it or the autobiography it produces ends with death, or earlier with loss of consciousness. But autobiographies are often the basis of biographies which do not end with the death of the subject. Biographies are the narrated aspect of lives, conjoining before death with the other general feature of lives, that is, lives-as-lived. If we are willing to allow lives-as-narrated to continue after death, even if bereft of lives-as-lived, then we have, I think, as good a post-mortem surrogate for the no longer existing liver of the life as we could want, a surrogate that can be harmed or benefited—and further extended—by what others do or say after the livers’ death. Let me try to explain.

Consider first the ways in which post-mortem events might harm or, more generally, might alter a *pre-mortem* life. A life with a betrayed confidence or broken

¹⁹For example, J. David Velleman, “The Self as Narrator,” in John Christman (ed.), Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays (forthcoming). For objections to narrative theories of the self, see Galen Strawson, “Against Narrativity,” Ratio 17 (2004), pp.428-452.

promise, for example, is a worse life than one without it. But could a post-mortem betrayal of a confidence, make that life worse than it otherwise would have been? If we accept the double-aspect of lives, then it could make it worse by altering how we would otherwise narrate that life.

Harms aside, after death there are often new sources of information about a life—dairies, letters, testimony, unsealed memoirs—that require us to revise our accounts of past events in the life. We see, for example, that someone had reasons to do or think what at the time and subsequently appeared naïve or rash. The particular dying and death itself may foster such retrospective revisions of earlier accounts. Through it, as if through a lens, we see earlier acts presaging or leading up to a final act of self-sacrifice, or suicide, or martyrdom.

More generally, such deaths and post-mortem discoveries may give earlier events a new significance. Previously, events that seemed too mundane to include in any account of the life may now be seen to contribute to the tone or character of the life. In the light of what followed, we see them as being different from what anyone, including the actor herself, had any reason to believe. Or, although initially significant, those prior acts take on a very different significance in the light of what they eventually led to, or what else subsequently happened, causality apart.

For such revisions, there is here no reason why death should make a difference: post-mortem actions—not just post-mortem discoveries in old letters, dairies, and memories of associates—can produce such redescriptive, reevaluative changes. (“We must stay the course, lest they will have died in vain and the attackers will have succeeded.”) The implication is that what we do will determine what kind of death they had, but not by retro-causality. We might call it retro-narration: the narrated life is altered in that we cannot continue to recount it as we previously had.²⁰

²⁰ Arthur Danto proposed a similar notion in his *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1965).

Revisions of pre-mortem events aside, there are post-mortem actions that alter a life by adding further events to it, for example, funerals and other later commemorative observances. A biographer must surely include in a life the immediate reactions to and effects of that death. (Surely, a biography of Romeo would include Juliet's despairing suicide.) There are also the actions taken in the light of answers to, "What would she have done in this situation?" or "What would she have wanted us to do in her absence?" "How can we best carry on her mission?"

There are often psychological and temporal limits to such efforts. Just as rowers or tandem bicycle riders may carry on for a while without a companion's contribution; so too, people who have shared a life with someone no longer present and active. But in both kinds of case, devotion to the person or their shared projects fades, and fatigue takes its toll. This may occur sooner than the seven years allowed by law for a missing person to return and reclaim his or her place in a life shared and held open by devoted kith and kin.

On one common view, the deceased do not need such acts of devoted life-continuance to "go on living." We are said to live on in our progeny. Presumably, this is by traits transmitted through having lived together and/or genetically based. I think, however, it would be stretching a biographical life too far to count the acts that manifest these traits as adding to the post-mortem life of the deceased ancestor. Rather, these are quite distinct lives that bear some resemblance to an ancestors' earlier life, but are not continuations of it.

In general, the relations of the lives of parents and children are, I find, the most difficult to spell out. Children are born into their parents' lives, often radically changing those lives before developing lives of their own. Subsequently, the lives of parent and children may remain inextricably intertwined, whether lived apart or under one roof as frail parents come to depend increasingly on their adult children's care. Our earlier criterion for individuating lives (One life per one social world) does not

work well in regard to family lives, but then neither do our usual moral distinctions and principles.²¹

Infant euthanasia is a case in point. Jim's Sanctity (or Respect) of Lives Principles helps us think about continued life-support for adults whose biographical life has been ended by accident or disease, but I do not think it helps with severely disabled newborns, as Jim applies it. To classify them simply as abiographical children, hence as candidates for euthanasia, ignores the fact that they have been born of, and to human mothers. Eager to avoid human chauvinism, or specieism, Jim gives no moral relevance, but arguably, it is a relational fact of their identity to be weighted in medical decisions. It is enough to give their biological life some moral worth, even if it is derived from that of the mother herself. Whatever their mental and physical capacities, they are their mothers' children and, for better or worse, are part of their mothers' lives.

How might the Sanctity or Respect of Life Principle come into play? A first response might be that the Principle prevents others from forcing her to keep and raise the child, thereby coercively transforming, or even ending the life she had been leading or expecting to lead. But if, as a mother, she has certain parental obligations in virtue of giving birth, they presumably are not overridden by that Principle. And, if there are such obligations, they would presumably involve acting for the good of the child. Although the child's good is not completely separable from her own, I do not see how it could be expressed in biographical terms; nor could the decision she might

²¹ Witness Jim's efforts (with the notion of "partial bias") to reconcile parents' special obligations with justice's demand of impartiality in James Rachels, *Can Ethics Provide Answers? and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield 1997), pp.239-232.

reach with a physician to help the child die. That decision, of course, may subsequently shape or change the life she continues to lead without the child.²²

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

Let us return to the euthanasia cases to which Jim's principle is clearly applicable, namely, adults with permanent loss of consciousness. For these morally less complex cases, Jim would surely have resisted any suggestion that lives might be continued by devoted others past the point at which the prognosis was made. To allow this possibility would seem to subvert a central aim of *The End of Life*, namely, to allow physicians and families to discontinue treatment in good conscience once permanent loss of consciousness is established.

I am not sure, however, that allowing for possible life-extensions would make much clinical difference. Even if physicians did subscribe to Jim's criterion, they would not overrule families who thought of the patients' biographical life as still continuing. Moreover, if physicians were to agree with the family about the life still continuing, they might be all the more inclined to urge the end of life-support, lest the patient's life have a "a bad last chapter," composed of images of their relative wasting away, contorted and enshrouded in medical equipment—surely post-mortem harms to the relative's life. Even if somewhat reassured about clinical consequences, Jim would surely have remained skeptical without further clarification of the kind that admirably marked his own thought.

After working over the several topics I have discussed here, we might have gone onto other life-questions. How many lives may conjoined twins lead? O someone with a Multiple Personality Disorder? Would some with locked-in syndrome cease to have a life? When or where would the life of a feral child begin—in the wild or in a household or institution? Could a clone hope to repeat the nucleus donor's life? What

²² In this regard, think of Japanese women who name, bury, visit and pray for aborted fetuses at least once a year. See William R. LaFleur, *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

conditions would allow a thawed and revived person frozen before death to restart his or her life? Is trust as central to a life as hope?

Whether or not these questions would have further developed the notion of a biographical life, or rather, shown its limited value, they would have surely provided the delight and instruction that philosophical discussion with Jim always had. Thanks, to Jim, his family, and his physicians his death was as good a death as one might hope for in the circumstances, but that fact does little to console his survivors for the continuing loss we suffer.