Making Persons?

Luther, Transhumanism, and the Limits of Human Specification

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1.0 A Family and a Scorecard

In May 2026, Rob Stein reported for National Public Radio on a new reproductive market. Christian Ward, a tax accountant with Type 1 diabetes, and his wife Julia, a nurse practitioner, had signed up for Nucleus Genomics primarily because they wanted to reduce the chance that a future child would develop Christian's disease. Nucleus marketed polygenic embryo scores not only for disease risk but for height, body mass index, longevity, predicted IQ, eye color, hair color, baldness, acne, and handedness. Ward himself remarked on the strangeness of being able to consider hair and eye color alongside disease risk, while Julia emphasized that their principal concern was medical. Orchid Health, in Palo Alto, California, largely concentrated on health risks. Herasight operates an embryo-screening laboratory in Morrisville, North Carolina, assessing health and nonmedical traits. Nucleus Genomics advertised what its founder called "genetic optimization." The phrase is arresting because the underlying act is so ordinary. Nothing need be edited, and no new gene need be inserted. Several embryos may already exist, and a scorecard can help prospective parents decide which one to transfer.[1] The case is philosophically tidier than many of the examples that have carried the transhumanism debate for thirty years. Neural uploading, radical life extension, and inheritable genome editing quickly provoke an argument about whether the technology will work. Embryo scoring is already sold even though its claimed clinical benefits remain unproven. The moral question therefore arrives before scientific maturity: what happens when a hope for a healthy child becomes a comparative specification applied across embryos? I write for the family, genetic counselor, physician, and pastor who may encounter this decision, as well as for the philosophical seminar.

The scientific caution is substantial. The American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG) published a points-to-consider statement in 2024 warning against treating polygenic embryo scores as though they had established clinical utility; the American Society for Reproductive Medicine reached a similarly skeptical conclusion in its 2026 journal opinion. A 2026 survey of 152 reproductive medicine physicians found much greater willingness to consider polygenic screening for serious disease than for nonmedical traits, as well as considerable reluctance to let polygenic scores override ordinary embryo-ploidy or morphology judgments.[2] Type 1 diabetes is a complex condition: a polygenic score concerns susceptibility, not a diagnosis or a guarantee that disease will be prevented. The number of embryos available for comparison and the interaction of genetic with environmental factors further limit what such scores can promise. None of this decides the ethics. It does, however, prevent a speculative promise of precision from carrying moral weight the science has not earned.

I shall take the Wards as my anchor because their case joins four questions that are too often discussed separately. What conception of human nature licenses transhumanist enhancement? When does a duty to prevent harm become a duty to improve? What happens to the grammar of benefit when selection determines which embryo is implanted? Finally, what, after philosophy has done its work, can Christian theology add without being smuggled in as a premise of a secular argument? My answer draws on an account of divine address and creaturely particularity defended on independent theological grounds elsewhere. Here I state its relevant premises openly and examine what follows for embryos already in existence. The final question leads to Luther's *oeconomia*, the household, and to the doctrine usually called the three estates. I shall not assume that readers know what those terms mean; most working theologians today do not employ *oeconomia* at breakfast, and there is no virtue in pretending otherwise.

2.0 From Humanism to Transhumanism

Transhumanism did not begin in a fertility clinic. The word is usually associated with Julian Huxley, who in 1957 spoke of humanity deliberately transcending itself. Nick Bostrom's influential history places Huxley within a longer genealogy of Enlightenment perfectibility, evolutionary thought, and later technological optimism.[3] The term then receded before reappearing among the extropians of the 1980s and 1990s, advocates of open-ended human improvement through reason, technology, and self-transformation. Max More gave the movement much of its modern vocabulary: reason, technological self-transformation, individual choice, radical life extension, and movement toward a posthuman condition.[4] It is tempting to dismiss this as California enthusiasm with a metaphysics attached. That would be too easy,

however, for the serious transhumanist claim involves a significant ethical issue: what is the normative status of inherited human limits? Bostrom puts the point memorably, writing, "transhumanists view human nature as a work-in-progress, a half-baked beginning that we can learn to remold in desirable ways."[5] The sentence denies that the form in which humanity happens to have arrived carries decisive normative privilege simply because it is inherited. Since evolution has already altered capacities, medicine already changes natural histories, education already reorganizes cognition, and technology already expands what human bodies can do, why should the present phenotype suddenly be sacred?

That question has force. An opponent of enhancement must distinguish the claim that a change alters inherited human form from the claim that it is wrong. The former does not entail the latter. I shall call this the Malleability Argument.

Argument [AN]—The Malleability of Human Nature

P1. A change is not morally impermissible merely because it alters an inherited human trait unless inherited human form has independent normative privilege.

P2. Since human capacities and forms of life are historically and technologically malleable, inheritance alone does not establish such privilege.

C. Therefore, the bare fact that an intervention alters inherited human nature does not establish its impermissibility.[6]

AN is a limited dialectical argument about warrant. It does not establish that inherited human form lacks normative privilege; it shows that bare inheritance, taken by itself, does not supply the independent moral premise needed to condemn change. The restriction matters. Other arguments for the value of embodied human life may succeed, even though the appeal to inheritedness alone fails. The appendix therefore marks the body of considerations under discussion explicitly, rather than treating the absence of warrant from one consideration as absence of warrant altogether.

Although AN is a defeater of one objection, it is silent on the questions of which changes are good, which are just, and which are obligatory. This point matters because enhancement debates regularly move too quickly from "unnatural" to "wrong." Plainly, Bostrom is justified in demanding another premise.

Bostrom makes a parallel move with respect to the issue of dignity. In "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity," he argues that dignity need not be tied to exact conformity with the present human phenotype. A being with greater capacities for agency, self-direction, cognition, and flourishing need not possess less dignity simply because it has become posthuman.[7] Again, the argument is defensive, blocking the inference from posthuman difference to degraded status. Crucially, it does not

yet tell us what makes the posthuman numerically identical with the human who undertook the transformation. That question is easier to overlook because ordinary grammar supplies the answer before metaphysics has earned it. When we say, "I shall enhance myself," the pronoun "I" quietly does a great deal of work, but to what does this "I" refer? What is that by virtue of which the one who is human is precisely the same one as the one now posthuman?

The practical moral argument became sharper in Julian Savulescu's work. His principle of procreative beneficence roughly says that when prospective parents can choose among possible children, they have moral reason to select the child expected to have the best life, given the relevant information. In later work Savulescu makes the continuity with treatment explicit: if one accepts an obligation to prevent disease and promote well-being, why should genetic enhancement be morally excluded simply because it goes beyond therapy? The clinic's advertisement says, "You may choose." Procreative beneficence asks whether, under some conditions, the morally serious sentence is "you should so choose."[8]

Recent discussions of transhumanism have widened the question again. While Bostrom's *Deep Utopia* asks what a meaningful life would look like after many of the instrumental problems that occupy present life have been solved, Timnit Gebru and Émile Torres attack a different trajectory, arguing that transhumanism often travels in a wider ideological bundle with extropianism, singularitarianism, cosmism, effective altruism, and longtermism.[9] I shall not adjudicate that wider dispute here, for the embryo case is difficult enough for our purposes. However, the recent literature does show that transhumanism has moved from a philosophy of technological possibility toward a dispute about what human beings ought ultimately to become.

3.0 The Case for Enhancement

The enhancement position deserves its best argument, for a weak opponent makes a weak victory. Clearly, when a parent can prevent a serious harm to a child by a safe vaccination, few believe that the parent may ignore that possibility simply because the child's unvaccinated state is "natural." Furthermore, few would object to interventions for the child that predictably improve health without introducing morally relevant new costs. As such, why then should the label *enhancement* defeat the reason that has already justified treatment?

This is the intuitive route into what I shall call the Enhancement Obligation Argument. I state it in ordinary language in the text, leaving its fully regimented form for the appendix. The order matters, for while formal symbols are useful when they expose an ambiguity or a missing premise, they should not be asked to create an argument the prose has not yet made.

Argument [AO]—The Enhancement Obligation Argument

P1. If an agent can, by a treatment, bring about a morally relevant increase in the expected well-being of a determinate beneficiary (paradigmatically, by preventing an expected, serious harm) at reasonable cost and risk, the agent has a *pro tanto* obligation to do so.

P2. If an enhancement would bring about the same morally relevant increase in the expected well-being of that same beneficiary at reasonable cost and risk, the agent has the same *pro tanto* obligation to employ it, for the label 'enhancement' is not itself a morally relevant feature capable of defeating the obligation in P1.

P3. Some genetic or reproductive interventions classified as treatments or enhancements can produce such increases in expected well-being for determinate beneficiaries at reasonable cost and risk.

C. Therefore, where P1–P3 apply to the same beneficiary, prospective parents can have a *pro tanto* obligation to use an available genetic or reproductive intervention.

The word *same* in P2 carries the pressure, and it is worth seeing why rather than simply asserting it. The claim is that a duty structurally identical to the duty to treat also holds for enhancement when treatment and enhancement produce the same improvement in the *same* person's expected well-being. The question then becomes what precisely is the one putatively "the same" in enhancement? P2 is therefore a positive parity claim and not merely a negative one. To deny that the label defeats the obligation is not yet to affirm that the obligation transfers, for something other than the label might still distinguish the cases, and a critic who grants the former has not thereby granted P2.

AO presupposes a determinate beneficiary. A vaccination is given to this child, whereas embryo selection can determine which of several existing embryos will receive the opportunity to develop. One might have a duty to prevent malady S in beneficiary a without thereby having a duty to select a different beneficiary in place of a. That distinction is independent of whether therapy, prevention, and enhancement exhaust the relevant clinical classifications: the formal argument need range only over interventions shown to be treatments or enhancements. Its conclusion cannot be extended to selecting among embryos without an additional premise about comparative prospective lives. (The appendix supplies the restricted derivation.)

Savulescu's stronger embryo-selection principle supplies the needed bridge. Call it BP, for Procreative Beneficence:

Bridge Principle [BP]—Procreative Beneficence

If a reproductive choice determines which person will exist, prospective parents have *pro tanto* reason to choose among the available possible children the child whose life is expected to go best, other things being equal.

AO and BP should not be merged (see the appendix for their distinct schemata). AO quantifies over an agent, an intervention, and a determinate beneficiary; BP compares outcomes associated with members of an available set of embryos. Even granting the premises of AO supplies neither a well-being ranking across distinct possible lives nor a rule for acting on that ranking. A patient-affecting obligation is not thereby a selection principle. Conversely, BP gives a *pro tanto* reason, not automatically an obligation, to prefer one prospective life, and competing moral reasons may defeat it. The distinction turns on the objects and normative force of the two principles, not on a verbal difference between treatment and enhancement. Selection among embryos already formed also introduces a further question concerning what is owed to each existing organism, as the theological argument will show.

Bostrom's account of posthuman dignity now raises a further problem. Suppose an agent *a* is human at t_1 and, because of reasons grounded in human flourishing, ought to undergo transformation P. Suppose P succeeds so radically that *a* is no longer human at t_2. We have something like:

$$H(a,t1) \rightarrow O[a,P(a)]$$

$$P(a) \rightarrow \neg H(a,t2).$$

What follows about the force of the original norm at t_2? Nothing follows merely from those two formulas. Some obligations are transition-directed. Because I am sick, I ought to become healthy, and once healthy, the obligation generated by sickness disappears. That comparison, however, creates an awkward question for transhumanism, for is humanity functioning like a pathology whose good lies in its own supersession? Surely that is too strong, for if humanity is merely a developmental platform, what makes posthumanization a fulfillment of human good rather than replacement of one good by another?

The question is not verbal but concerns the persistence of a normative ground through a transformation that is defined partly by leaving that ground behind. I shall return to it after considering the principal objections.

4.0 Three Objections and What They Actually Show

Three objections to the enhancement position have shaped the literature, and each must be stated at full strength before its reach can be measured. They are not arguments of one type. Sandel's concerns the internal goods of a practice, Habermas'

reciprocity presupposed by moral equality, and the problem raised by Agar and Parfit, the logical form of benefit itself. I take them in that order. None of them, taken alone, yields a prohibition, but each blocks a route the enhancement argument had hoped to travel.

4.1 Sandel and the Good of Receptive Parenthood

Michael Sandel's *The Case Against Perfection* is often treated as a generalized protest against biotechnology. Its strongest argument is more exact, however, for Sandel's worry is about the form of agency expressed when parenthood becomes a project of mastery. The good at issue is giftedness: the capacity to receive a child whose worth is not conditional upon conformity to a parental specification.[10]

This should not be caricatured as a demand that parents stop choosing. Parents routinely choose schools, neighborhoods, medical treatments, diets, religious practices, musical lessons, and innumerable other things that shape a child's future, sometimes badly. Sandel's objection concerns a different exercise of choice: the use of preferences to determine which embryo is transferred for gestation and, where others are excluded, which future child will be raised. On the theological premise defended later, responsibilities toward existing embryos do not begin only when transfer occurs.

Call the parent *p* and the parent's own set of selection criteria C; I regiment these labels fully in the appendix.

Argument [AG]—The Giftedness Argument

P1. Proper parental love includes a receptive disposition toward the child as a person whose worth does not depend upon satisfying a prior parental specification.

P2. In nonmedical embryo-trait selection, a prior parental specification can be causally decisive in determining which embryo is transferred for gestation, and in some cases which developmental continuant will be raised by the intending parents.

P3. A practice that makes comparative specification govern a consequential decision about which existing embryo receives a developmental opportunity places the good described in P1 under pressure.

C. Therefore, nonmedical embryo-trait selection places the receptive disposition described in P1 under a standing risk of strain, even when the parents' eventual love for the child is entirely sincere. (The appendix sets out a restricted regimentation using the developmental continuant d(e), receptivity Rcv(p,x), and allocation Alloc(p,e,C).)

What does the formalization show? It does not prove the normative premise, for first-order logic cannot manufacture the value of receptive parenthood. It locates the disputed premise instead. The criterion-set is not simply one influence on the education or treatment of a fixed recipient. It may determine which existing embryo receives transfer now and, if others are excluded, who is afforded the opportunity of gestation at all. That structural difference requires moral assessment; it does not itself prove parental love defective.

A parent may say, quite truthfully, "I selected this embryo and I love this child without condition." Sandel need not deny the sincerity, since love after birth and the public grammar of selection are distinct matters. A person may love the result of a market transaction while the market still changes the social meaning of the good exchanged. Sandel develops that wider corruption argument elsewhere.[11] In the reproductive case, the question is whether a prior comparative filtering rule has been allowed to govern which existing embryo receives a consequential opportunity for development.

James Tabery's warning about the "illusion of control," reported in Stein's NPR account, is suggestive but not decisive. Sandel's argument does not require a sociological prediction that selecting parents will become less affectionate. It asks whether comparative optimization ought to organize a consequential choice about embryonic life. That is a question about the practice, not a diagnosis of the hearts of particular mothers and fathers.

4.2 Habermas and Authorial Asymmetry

Jürgen Habermas approaches enhancement from another direction. In *The Future of Human Nature*, he asks whether intentional genetic programming can threaten the reciprocal moral self-understanding of persons by giving one person a kind of unilateral authorship over another's biological starting conditions.[12] The worry belongs to his account of moral equality and communicative reciprocity. While a later person may contest an upbringing, reject a parental religion, forgive bad schooling, or refuse an inherited social role, a deliberately programmed biological trait appears different because the programming is built into the starting point from which later self-revision proceeds.

Embryo selection is not genetic programming; the selected embryo's genome remains unaltered. A bridge to Habermas must therefore concern the self-understanding of the later person, not simply the fate of another embryo. One might learn that one's presence in the family depended upon a calculated profile outranking that of other embryos conceived by one's parents. Such knowledge does not necessarily destroy reciprocity, but it can make one's existence appear conditionally approved in a way that ordinary upbringing does not.

Argument [AA]—The Authorial Asymmetry Argument, Extended to Selection

P1. Reciprocal moral self-understanding can be placed under strain when a person's constitutive biological starting point appears to have been unilaterally governed by another's contested preferences.

P2. Deliberate genetic programming can instantiate the authorship described in P1 by fixing traits according to parental purposes.

P3. Selection does not alter a genome, but a later child can know that their place in the family depended upon a prior comparison in which predicted traits caused one existing embryo to be transferred and others to be excluded.

P4. Where that condition obtains, preference-driven selection may pose an analogous challenge to the selected person's retrospective understanding of unconditional welcome; the analogy does not require claiming that the chosen genome itself was programmed.

C. Consequently, some preference-driven selection practices face a Habermasian objection concerning the selected child's eventual self-understanding. This does not prove that such harm occurs or that every transfer-order decision has the same significance.

Let SelProfile(p,e,C) mean that parent p selected embryo e because its score under preference-set C outranked alternatives, and let LaterKnows(x,SelProfile(p,e,C)) say that the later person x, developed from e, knows this fact. The proposed authorial analogy depends on the relation between those two descriptions and possible impairment of reciprocity, rather than on defining selection as genomic editing.

$$\forall p \forall e \forall C[(\text{SelProfile}(p,e,C) \wedge \text{LaterKnows}(d(e),\text{SelProfile}(p,e,C))) \rightarrow \text{PossibleStrain}(d(e),p,C)]$$

The displayed conditional makes the disputed bridge visible. A defender of embryo selection may reject it, pointing out that a child can understand selection as loving medical prudence or as an act of welcome rather than as conditional acceptance. That reply is stronger for decisions concerning grave disease than for height or eye color. Habermas' argument supplies a possible second-person objection; the first-person and fiduciary claims of other embryos are addressed by the Reception Argument, not falsely attributed to Habermas.

Nor should we assume that mere knowledge of genetic selection undermines self-respect. That would need empirical and moral defense. Habermas helps specify what must be defended: whether a consequential parental decision can be justified to the later person as compatible with reciprocal standing, rather than as a verdict upon which preferred qualities warranted that person's existence.

The contrast with editing thus remains real, but the analogy is neither empty nor certain. Its application turns on which criteria governed selection and what significance they could reasonably bear for a person who later learns of them.

4.3 Agar, Parfit, and the Beneficiary Problem

Nicholas Agar's Humanity's End is concerned primarily with radical enhancement and with the continuity between present human persons and their radically enhanced successors.[13] The embryo case introduces a related but cleaner identity problem. Derek Parfit's non-identity discussion made the general form familiar: many reproductive choices do not make one and the same person better or worse off, but they do help determine which person exists.[14]

That point is easily blurred. Suppose embryo e1 is transferred in world w1 and distinct embryo e2 in world w2. A standard person-affecting benefit comparison requires that one and the same beneficiary exist in both alternatives and fare worse in one. Under an explicitly origin-sensitive identity principle, the individuals developing from distinct embryos are themselves distinct. In that model, the familiar sentence "selection made this child better off than this child otherwise would have been" fails: the counterfactual alternative contains another child, not a worse-off version of this one. Origin-sensitivity is a substantive premise, not a theorem of first-order logic. The appendix states it explicitly.

Argument [AC]—The Beneficiary/Identity Argument

P1. A standard comparative claim that an intervention makes beneficiary x better off requires a relevant alternative in which that same x exists and fares worse.

P2. In the restricted, origin-sensitive comparison at issue, selecting e1 rather than distinct embryo e2 results in different later individuals, not two outcomes for the same individual.

P3. Consequently, that comparison does not by itself sustain the ordinary treatment claim that the selected child is better off than *that same child* would have been if e2 had been selected.

C. AO therefore cannot justify selection merely by importing the person-affecting benefit structure of treatment. A further principle such as BP would have to defend a comparative choice between lives, and the independent standing of the embryos remains another question.

AC does not show that selection is wrong; it identifies why treatment of an established beneficiary and choosing among embryos are different moral problems. Savulescu's procreative beneficence openly advances an impersonal comparative principle, so

the AO–BP distinction itself is not new. The further point of this article is that language about merely *possible* future persons can obscure the status of embryos who already exist and may have claims that the ranking does not discharge.

The embryo case also reveals the ambiguity in saying that 'there is no child before selection.' There are existing embryos; what is disputed is whether, and in what sense, each is already the same individual as the later child. A biological-organism account and a psychological account may answer differently. The important result is conditional: once selection changes the beneficiary, AO cannot establish a benefit to one and the same person across the alternatives.

5.0 The Transhumanist *Aporia*

The preceding arguments concern selection among existing embryos. A different transhumanist claim, however, concerns *self*-transformation: that this individual, now human, can become genuinely posthuman without being replaced by a successor, and that the reasons for undertaking the transformation remain intelligible across it. Not every transhumanist program asserts this. A project concerned only with future generations may accept succession rather than personal persistence. The *aporia* developed here addresses the stronger promise of the numerical survival of the one transformed.

Three requirements appear together.

The Transhumanist Commitment Set

I—Identity: enough persists for the posthuman to be numerically this same individual rather than a successor or replacement.

T—Transcendence: enough changes for the result genuinely to transcend the human rather than remain merely an unusually capable human being.

N—Normative continuity: the dignity, goods, reasons, or obligations appealed to in justifying the transformation remain applicable across the transformation.

Write $\Gamma_{TH} = \{I,T,N\}$ for this informal commitment set, not yet a formal first-order theory. The three claims need not be inconsistent. They create a demand for an account that can satisfy them jointly: if humanity is essential to the individual's persistence, T threatens I; if personhood carries persistence instead, the relevant identity criterion requires defense; and if the reasons for transformation are rooted in human goods, N requires an account of their continuing application after the change. What appears as a paradox is more accurately a problem of jointly defensible interpretation.

T must be construed strongly. Ordinary changes in capacity, including a pacemaker or cochlear implant, do not count as genuine transcendence of the human. In the radical case under consideration, the outcome ceases to qualify as human according to the relevant, independently stated criterion for being human. This does not prejudge whether the *person* persists: an account may make humanity accidental to personhood. The question is whether any defensible criterion tracks the numerical individual across that loss of human classification.

The orange-apple example is crude and useful. Suppose someone says, "This orange became this apple." We immediately ask what the demonstrative "this" is tracking across the change. If orange and apple name sortals with incompatible persistence conditions, the sentence cannot be rescued by pointing to spatiotemporal proximity. Something similar happens when a transhumanist writes:

$$H(a,t1) \wedge \neg H(a,t2).$$

The repeated constant a has already assumed numerical identity across the transition. Notation is doing us a favor by showing the assumption, but it has not justified it.

A defender may answer that "human" is not the persistence-bearing sortal; "person" is. Then we write:

$$H(a,t1) \wedge P(a,t1) \wedge \neg H(a,t2) \wedge P(a,t2).$$

Very well. What are the persistence conditions for P? Consciousness? Psychological continuity? A biological organism? An information pattern? A primitive thisness? The transhumanist can choose, but the choice is no longer a footnote. It determines whether self-enhancement is enhancement of this one or production of a successor sufficiently similar to inherit the rhetoric.

The normative issue is distinct. A reason to improve present human capacities need not survive unchanged once the subject is no longer human. Some reasons are transition-directed and expire upon success; other reasons, including duties respecting a particular person, may remain. N therefore does not say that every prior obligation persists, but that those goods and duties essential to the justification of *this individual's* transformation do not silently disappear or shift to a replacement. An account must specify which reasons survive and why.

Model theory can expose the assumption beneath a claim of persistence. A formal structure may represent one history continued in two successors, but it cannot tell us whether the represented relation is numerical identity. That depends upon an independently warranted constraint on admissible interpretations; Section 6 and the appendix make the difference explicit.

6.0 Model-Theoretic Clarification

The distinction between satisfaction and admissibility is useful precisely because more than one account of persistence can satisfy a thin description of continuity. I shall distinguish the formal relations, consider five competing accounts, and state what the branching example proves. Its technical construction appears in the appendix; its philosophical limits remain here.

6.1 Proof, Satisfaction, and Consequence

It helps to put three relations on the table. If Γ is a formal theory (a set of sentences) and φ a sentence, then

$$\Gamma \vdash \varphi$$

means that φ is derivable from Γ by stipulated proof or "transformation" rules. The consequence relation here is purely syntactic. If, however, M is an interpreted structure, then

$$M \models \varphi$$

means that M satisfies φ, or equivalently that φ is true in M under the interpretation supplied by M. This is a satisfaction relation, not yet semantic consequence. By contrast,

$$\Gamma \models \varphi$$

means that every structure or model satisfying Γ also satisfies φ. In first-order logic, soundness and completeness together connect the syntactic and semantic sides such that, where the formalization is genuinely first-order, $\Gamma \vdash \varphi$ iff $\Gamma \models \varphi$.[15]

That result is important and limited. While model theory does not give us an algorithm for every philosophical problem or choose the intended interpretation of "human," "person," "same," or "dignity," it does tell us what follows under a stipulated interpretation. Philosophical judgment begins where that formal result leaves off, asking which interpretations are most warranted by the subject matter we intend to discuss.

I have developed elsewhere a four-stage sequence distinguishing semantic satisfaction, admissibility, comparative adequacy, and truth.[16] Satisfaction asks whether a structure makes the theory true, while admissibility asks whether that model survives decisive constraints of the inquiry; comparative adequacy then ranks the surviving models by relevant virtues, and the resulting judgment can provide defeasible warrant for assertion. Truth, however, is a different matter entirely, for it concerns whether reality is as the asserted proposition says it is. The order matters because a model can succeed formally and still be the wrong model of the subject matter.

For present purposes, I write

$$\Gamma \models_K \varphi$$

where K is an independently defended class of admissible L-structures. Every member of K satisfying Γ must also satisfy φ. What matters is the justification for K: without it, restricting the range of models gives no additional warrant for a claim about personal persistence. The appendix develops a finite branching example for which unrestricted consequence and consequence over K differ.

6.2 Accounts of Persistence and the Branching Test

Five persistence accounts are in play: biological, psychological, informational, person-sortal, and haecceitistic. These are philosophical proposals rather than models of a single formal signature. Each must explain what makes a later stage a continuation of this individual instead of a suitable successor.

The biological account identifies persistence primarily with organismic continuity and accordingly handles embryo-to-adult continuity naturally because the embryo and adult can be stages of one living organism. It similarly deals well with ordinary bodily enhancement. The pressure comes with radical posthumanization, however, for if substrate replacement becomes sufficiently extensive, what organism can be said to continue? A defender can broaden biological continuity, but the more permissive the criterion becomes, the less obvious it is that biology is doing the individuating work.

The psychological account identifies persistence with suitable continuities of memory, intention, character, consciousness, or other psychological relations. While this account fits much of the ordinary language of selfhood and can survive dramatic bodily change, it is plagued by the Branching Problem, for if one psychological history is copied into two equally continuous successors, both may stand in the relevant similarity relation to the predecessor, even though numerical identity cannot branch in the same way.

The informational account makes the problem sharper. If the self is an information-bearing pattern, substrate independence becomes easier to imagine. Yet duplication is possible because one pattern can be instantiated twice. Exact pattern type-identity is an equivalence relation among implementations; weaker similarity may be symmetric without being transitive. Neither relation is numerical identity. Let ~ here denote pattern type-identity. Then a ~ b does not yield identity:

$$a \sim b \nvdash a=b.$$

Replication is easier to establish than survival. A transhumanist who is content with a successor may accept that consequence, but the promise that I shall survive requires more.

The person-sortal account says that humanity is accidental to persistence while personhood is not. This is perhaps the most natural way to preserve I and T together. The human at t_1 and posthuman at t_2 are the same person even though they differ in species membership. However, the solution merely relocates the work, for we still need an account of the persistence conditions for personhood. If those conditions are psychological, biological, or informational, the earlier problems return. If personhood is primitive, however, the account approaches the haecceitistic account discussed next.

The haecceitistic account gives the individual a primitive thisness or primitive identity capable of surviving qualitative alteration. While this account handles radical intrinsic change remarkably well, its cost is explanatory, for a primitive haecceity can stop a regress without thereby telling us why this particular is non-substitutable or why the normative significance attaching to it persists. The account may secure numerical identity and leave N underexplained.[17]

6.3 Satisfaction Is Cheap; Admissibility Is Not

The worked construction, now in the appendix, gives an exact result. A thin theory of informational continuity permits one predecessor to be connected to two distinct simultaneous successors. Once the admissible structures are constrained by non-branching numerical identity, the theory no longer entails that the predecessor persists as both. Yet the constraint leaves open whether either successor is identical with the predecessor. Who, then, is supposed to have survived? Nothing in the satisfaction relation answers that question, and the admissibility condition must be defended before the restricted consequence can carry metaphysical weight.

Admissibility Tests for Identity Models

1. Extension: does the model classify ordinary cases of persistence and replacement in ways we have independent reason to accept?
2. Modal profile: does it remain stable under copying, branching, radical bodily change, memory loss, and other counterfactual cases relevant to the theory?
3. Explanatory role: does the proposed relation explain why this one persists, or does it merely redescribe a pattern of similarity?
4. Normative continuity: does the model explain why dignity, obligation, benefit, and harm continue to concern this individual rather than a successor who resembles the individual sufficiently?

The fourth test bears especially on radical enhancement. Where the promise is that this person will survive, reasons owed to this person cannot be discharged by producing a sufficiently similar successor. The continuity relation requires its own defense.

Biological continuity provides a familiar explanation of embryo-to-adult development; psychological and informational continuity survive some bodily changes but can also be duplicated. A person-sortal account must explain its persistence conditions, and primitive thisness cannot substitute for an account of normative standing. The formal result chooses among none of them.

Embryonic twinning exhibits the difficulty in another setting: one early organism may give rise to two successors, although non-branching identity cannot identify it with both. That limitation concerns persistence. It leaves open what care the early organism is owed before division.

The language of a teleo-space may collect the possibilities and normative constraints involved in such a comparison. It adds no theorem to the argument made here.[18]

7.0 A Theological Change of Warrant: Divine Address and Personal Non-Substitutability

The identity problem is now clearer, though not uniquely solved. Christian theology enters with a different warrant. Neither first-order logic nor the limitations of intrinsic accounts entail a doctrine of creation. Invoking God merely because biological or psychological accounts face difficulty would repeat the God-of-the-gaps error in metaphysics.

The theological proposal arises independently from a doctrine of creaturely particularity I first defended in these pages and have since developed further.[19] Its thesis is that personal non-substitutability need not be grounded finally in qualitative profile, structural position, or brute intrinsic haecceity. The deeper ground can be divine address: the Father's loving donation of this creature as an irreducible "you"[20] within the inseparable action of Father, Son, and Spirit.[21] The Logos articulates what is so given into intelligible form; the Spirit orders the field normatively. The proposal is extrinsic in the relevant sense that what makes this one non-fungibly this one is not finally a property hidden inside the individual.

This is stronger than saying that God loves creatures already individuated. Divine address, on this account, grounds the non-substitutability of a creature received as an irreducible "you," not the arithmetic fact that there is one creature here or two. "Counting is downstream from love" concerns the order of explanation: enumeration distinguishes individuals, but does not tell us why this one cannot be replaced by another of equal capacities. Two pennies can be numerically distinct and remain fungible. Persons are not merely countable; the loss of this one is not made good by producing someone sufficiently similar.[22]

Three questions must be distinguished here. Numerical distinctness asks whether a and b are two rather than one; diachronic identity asks whether a at one time is the very individual encountered at another; moral non-substitutability asks why the loss of a cannot be compensated simply by producing b, however similar b may be. The fact that two human organisms are numerically distinct does not, by itself, settle their moral standing. Nor does the bare assertion of a primitive thisness yield a norm of protection. Divine address is proposed to do more than mark an identity: within a Christian account of creation it grounds the worth of this individual as one to whom care is owed. That normative work is a further theological claim, not a theorem about identity.

What happens to the transhumanist *aporia* under this model? The first result is that radical intrinsic change need not by itself destroy identity, for if the identity of the creature is not constituted by one privileged intrinsic profile, then change from H at t_1 to ¬H at t_2 does not automatically imply replacement. The second result is that normative continuity no longer has to supervene simply upon present capacities. The creature's non-fungible worth is grounded in the divine relation that gives this one, even while capacities and forms change. In that respect, an address model has resources for I, T, and N that the intrinsic models lack in combination.[23]

The address model rests on theological grounds independent of the finite example. Christological resurrection confesses that the crucified Jesus himself is raised, not a qualitative successor; creaturely love refuses to treat one person as replaceable by a similar individual; and Scripture speaks of God's knowing and forming particular human lives. The first ground concerns numerical persistence, the second moral non-substitutability, the third a creative relation that does not wait upon the emergence of mature rational capacities. Psalm 139:13–16 speaks of God's formation and regard in the womb; Jeremiah 1:5 addresses the prophet as known before birth; Luke 1:41–44 ascribes significance to the unborn John. These texts are not embryological treatises, and Jeremiah's prophetic call cannot simply be generalized as a proof of every embryo's full moral standing. They do give Christian theology reason to speak of divine regard for unborn particular lives. Mere *de re* creation would be insufficient—the creation of a penny is likewise particular. The further claim is a personal address whose object is received as a "you."

The embryo application therefore involves an explicit theological premise. An embryo already in existence is an individual living human organism, not merely a possible future conception. That biological fact does not by itself establish personal moral standing. My proposal is that God's personally directed and valuing address already concerns this embryonic life. The scriptural witness just considered, taken with Christian claims about creation and the protection owed to vulnerable neighbors, supports this judgment without making it a theorem. Accordingly, the embryo belongs among the existing claimants whose interests parental authority

must consider. A reader who rejects this premise will reasonably reject some of the ethical conclusions that follow; the precise disagreement concerns divine regard and moral standing, not the algebra of identity.

Where one embryo gives rise to twins, numerical identity cannot pass to both later individuals under a non-branching account; whether the earlier organism persists as one, or as neither, remains disputed. Divine address does not resolve the numerical question. It affirms that the earlier living organism stands within God's regard, just as each later twin does, without locating the ground of their worth in a measurable feature of the early embryo.

There is an irony worth noticing. Radical transhumanism needs thisness more desperately as transformation becomes more radical. If the later being differs only slightly from me, ordinary continuities do most of the work, but if the later being differs radically in body, capacity, lifespan, memory architecture, and perhaps species membership, the sentence "that is still me" needs a much more robust ground. The more successfully transhumanism transcends the human, the more difficult it becomes to explain the demonstrative "this" using only the intrinsic properties being transcended.

This result will matter when we return to embryo selection, for a preference-driven selection system operates by profiles, and the theological account says that the person is not finally a profile. While that does not make genetic information useless, it does tell us what genetic information cannot tell us: why this one is non-fungibly this one.

One last distinction prevents a false inference. Radical posthuman transformation poses a problem of persistence across time: will the later individual still be this one? Embryo selection presents a different problem: several developing individuals exist, and a decision favors one over others. The cases are related because qualitative profiles do not themselves establish the identity or worth of the individuals concerned, but the argument against embryo selection does not follow simply from the transhumanist *aporia*. It requires the additional moral premises now brought into view.

8.0 Luther's *Oeconomia* and the Three Estates

Divine address supplies an account of the standing of particular creatures. What sort of authority, then, belongs to those who must care for them? Luther's three estates furnish a historically specific answer concerning the household. I shall distinguish his account of divine institution and human administration from the fiduciary principle I propose to draw from it, since a sixteenth-century doctrine of household vocation cannot be made into a ruling on embryo selection without further argument.

8.1 What Does *Oeconomia* Mean?

The word oeconomia will sound archaic to many readers and misleadingly familiar to others. It is the Latinized form of the Greek *oikonomia*, the ordering or management of the *oikos*, the household. In classical usage, the household included more than the modern nuclear family, involving marriage, children, servants, property, work, production, education, and the ordinary governance required to sustain a common life. The term therefore overlaps with what later became "economics," but Luther's *oeconomia* cannot be translated simply as the economy, nor is it the patristic "economy of salvation." In the texts relevant here, it means the household estate, broadly conceived.[24]

This matters because Luther's three estates are not three social classes, that is, clergy, nobility, and peasantry under new names. They are instead overlapping orders in which ordinary people live: *ecclesia*, the order constituted by God's Word and worship; *oeconomia*, the household and its associated work of marriage, nurture, labor, education, and provision; and *politia*, civil or political order. The same person may inhabit all three at once. A mother may hear and confess the Word in *ecclesia*, rear children and manage a household in *oeconomia*, and live as citizen or magistrate within *politia*. "Estate" here names a structured field of vocation and authority, not a caste.[25]

Luther's Genesis lectures provide the most direct creation-theological exposition. Commenting on Genesis 2:16–17, he places the institution of the church before the household and the polity; the household is then constituted within the creation narrative. In the prelapsarian setting coercive civil governance is not yet the remedy that sin will require. Luther's next observation matters as much as the sequence of institutions: Adam is charged with the administration of the household. Thus God institutes the *oeconomia*, yet human beings genuinely administer it. Gift and human making are not rival explanations, for Adam acts within an order he neither originates nor owns without limit.[26]

The distinction extends beyond the Genesis lectures. In the 1528 *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, Luther describes the three hierarchies and their concrete duties in home, city, and church.[27] In the 1539 circular disputation he states that God ordained three hierarchies—household, polity, and church—while also saying that magistracy and household, though human ordinances, have God's testimony.[28] The *Large Catechism* supplies the complementary account of parental office: other earthly authority is related to parental authority, yet parents themselves remain subject to God's command; children are given, and parents are commanded to raise and govern them according to his will.[29] The historical materials establish neither a ban on technology nor a rule about embryo transfer. They establish a distinction between the source of an office and the authority exercised within it.

8.2 A Short History—and a Warning

The vocabulary has its own history. Luther's *oeconomia* belongs to the classical and late-medieval discourse of household governance; sixteenth-century Lutheran writers then developed explicitly Christian accounts of household life. Justus Menius' *Oeconomia Christiana* (1529) is a pertinent example.[30] Later Lutheran ethics systematized the three estates under the language of divine orders or orders of creation. That later history, especially twentieth-century appeals to allegedly given arrangements of nation, state, and social hierarchy, should not simply be read back into Luther.[31] What matters here is the historically identifiable relation of institution to administration, not the claim that every inherited household arrangement has permanent divine sanction.

The historical warning also guards the constructive argument. 'God institutes' is a consequential claim and an easily abused one; it cannot baptize whatever arrangement happens to exist. Luther's prelapsarian Adam already works, tends the garden, and employs *industria et ars*. But innocent Adam also receives a genuine prohibition. Human making and creaturely limitation therefore belong to the same creational grammar.[32] Nor may we distribute the three estates into rigid boxes, as though *oeconomia* concerned gift while *politia* alone concerned management. Parents plan, prescribe medicine, divide work, keep accounts, and exercise prudent discretion. A household without management would not be holy; it would be hungry.

The question must be narrower: what is constitutive of the household's relation to persons as persons?

8.3 Institution, Administration, and Reception

Reception is my constructive term, not Luther's name for a modern reproductive principle. Nevertheless, the Genesis 2 exposition provides a real linguistic basis for it. Luther says that Adam does not take Eve *ex suo arbitrio*; he waits for God to bring her. Eve is offered by God, Adam is prepared *ad Heuam suscipiendam*, and upon her presentation he recognizes her (*agnoscit eam*). The point is not that Adam remains inert or refrains from naming, for he recognizes and names Eve. It is that his recognition responds to one already given, rather than bestowing her identity or worth by prior specification.[33]

The analogy has a limit that ought not be concealed. The Genesis narrative concerns the presentation of Eve to Adam, not a choice among embryos, and it supplies no direct legal or clinical rule. It would be extravagant to infer that Luther prohibits every deliberation about marriage, conception, or medical treatment. The historical text contributes a grammar of divine donation and human recognition. Its application to comparative embryo ranking depends upon an additional account of who is already owed care and what reasons can justify treating such individuals differently.

The theme reappears in Luther's treatment of children. In his exposition of Genesis 9, he calls offspring God's gift and observes that human beings do not always receive them as such. Elsewhere he describes it as a lofty designation that children are God's gift; commenting on Genesis 16, he says that when offspring are given the house is built and the *oeconomia* rightly constituted.[34] These claims concern generation and household life, not a historically available practice of genetic screening. They nonetheless explain why reception is more than an attractive modern metaphor: it interprets Luther's pairing of divine gift and responsive human recognition.

None of this makes the household passive. The *Large Catechism* says that God gives children and commands parents to raise and govern them. Luther's Genesis lectures likewise affirm that the God who formed Adam from the earth continues to create human beings through parental generation.[35] Human procreation, education, healing, and governance are real forms of agency, not mere occasions for divine action. The office is entrusted to parents precisely so that they may act for the good of others. But authority to act for another is not identical to authority to make that individual's worth depend upon a preferred list of characteristics.

Luther's contrast between divine institution and human administration has a further bearing upon authority. The command to govern and nurture the household is not ownership of those entrusted to it. Parents may exercise judgment precisely because the members of the household have claims upon their care. The authority is real, but its purpose supplies its limits: its exercise must answer to the good of those for whom it is exercised. This is a constructive ethical inference from Luther's vocational grammar, not a passage in which Luther adjudicates IVF. A fiduciary interpretation makes the inference explicit.

Luther's 1542 *Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage* adds a pastoral witness.[36] Addressing grief over children lost before baptism, Luther does not treat the unborn or stillborn merely as failed reproductive projects; he directs the grieving toward God's mercy. The text is not a proof of a modern theory of zygotic personhood, and his precise question concerns salvation and consolation. It nevertheless supports the claim that the unborn belongs within the scope of theological concern rather than being measured only by parental expectation.

These materials permit a Reception Argument whose theological, historical, and moral premises can be tested separately.

Argument [AR]—The Reception and Fiduciary Administration Argument

P1. [Theological standing] On the account of divine address defended in Section 7, each already-existing embryonic human organism has prima facie moral standing. Its interests must therefore enter parental deliberation

even when other embryos possess more attractive predicted characteristics; standing alone does not settle a conflict among claims.

P2. [Entrusted office] In Luther's oeconomia, household authority is administered under divine institution rather than owned without limit. Appropriated normatively, parental authority is fiduciary: those exercising it are answerable to the good of those entrusted to their care.

P3. [Fiduciary judgment] Where several beings possess prima facie claims, the allocation of a consequential opportunity requires reasons concerning their interests, justice among them, or the legitimate purposes of the entrusted office. The more irreversible the deprivation, the stronger the required justification. This principle is defensible in other relations of entrusted care; it does not follow from the historical Luther texts alone.

P4. [Beneficiary and preference] In the origin-sensitive comparison of AC, selecting one embryo rather than another does not improve the selected embryo's genetic prospects. Transfer may nonetheless give an existing embryo a developmental opportunity; another may lose that opportunity. A parental preference for nonmedical predicted traits is not, without further justification, a fiduciary reason sufficient to govern a consequential allocation. Serious medical risk may be relevant to a fair transfer sequence, though a superior medical score does not itself override the claims of others.

P5. [Clinical application] Polygenic ranking can govern transfer order or permanent exclusion. When surplus embryos are created with exclusion anticipated, the allocation problem begins before screening; where each embryo remains genuinely intended for transfer, the case concerns the justification and consequences of sequence.

C. [Conditional conclusion] Given P1–P5, preference for nonmedical predicted traits alone does not justify materially consequential transfer priority or permanent exclusion. Grave medical considerations can contribute to a defensible transfer order, subject to the claims of other embryos and the risks of treatment; a score cannot, without further grounds, justify their indefinite abandonment or destruction.

The argument's warrant must be located where it belongs. P1 is a theological judgment about embryonic standing, independently developed in Section 7; it does not already declare every allocation illicit. P2 characterizes the parental office through Luther, while P3 advances a fiduciary principle that one can test against familiar duties of trustees, guardians, and clinicians entrusted with the good of others. P4 examines whether genetic scores answer to that principle and keeps distinct an embryo's inherited prospects and the developmental opportunity afforded by transfer. P5 identifies the relevant decisions. The appendix sets out the conditional inference;

its validity is no substitute for defending the theological and ethical premises, which is precisely what the article undertakes.

8.4 What Is Being Administered?

A household cannot avoid specifying outcomes. Parents treat illness, provide education, and seek the conditions under which children flourish. These acts concern a recipient whose worth is already acknowledged. Where embryos exist, however, choosing which receives transfer allocates an opportunity among claimants. Viability, risk to the mother, and the burdens of repeated procedures can matter to that decision, but preference for a predicted child cannot claim the status of a treatment without identifying the person treated and the good secured.

The point concerns the jurisdiction of an entrusted office. Triage can be unavoidable, and responsible parents must sometimes act under imperfect information; what they need is a reason addressed to the interests of the claimants, not an attractive score standing in place of such a reason.

There is an obvious objection. Decisions about when to conceive, and with whom, affect who will exist. I agree, but before conception there is no existing embryo whose developmental opportunity the decision allocates. Once several embryos have been produced, a different question arises because a policy of selection now governs organisms which, on the theological account, already have claims. The identity of the later child remains relevant; the moral status of those who exist at the time of choice cannot be dissolved into a comparison among possible future persons.

What should parents do when one embryo faces a grave disease risk and another does not? Selecting e_2 rather than e1 does not improve e_2's inherited genetic prospects: no genotype is repaired by transfer. Yet e_2 already exists, and transfer may afford it an opportunity for development which, under a different decision, would be denied. Equally, e_1 may lose that opportunity. We have therefore left the familiar treatment case for a problem of allocating goods among claimants. Serious medical considerations can bear upon that allocation because parents undertake the provision of care, and foreseeable grave suffering bears upon what caring for the child will involve. Habermas's criterion of reasonably presumed consent helps explain the difference in moral reasons: protection from grave suffering can normally be justified to a future child, whereas height or eye color ordinarily expresses the chooser's taste. Yet even a sound medical reason for ordering transfer does not extinguish e_1's claim, and probability, severity, maternal risk, possible treatment, and the burdens of delay must enter the judgment. The distinction gives moral reasons their appropriate weight without converting comparative ranking into a warrant for abandonment.[37]

Luther's account cannot decide every clinical conflict. It establishes that extensive competence in the household coexists with a limit upon its authority; Adam's

labor and ingenuity were no exemption from that limit. A technology can rank outcomes without thereby establishing what parents ought to do with those ranked.

8.5 Disease Selection and the Embryos Not Chosen

Suppose embryo e_1 has a much higher estimated risk of a devastating early-onset disease than embryo e_2. Selection cannot make e_2 genetically healthier: e_2 already possesses its genome. Transfer may, however, provide e_2 with a developmental opportunity which would otherwise go to e_1. The decision thus involves competing claims and foreseeable burdens rather than the benefit of replacing one possible child with a genetically preferable version of itself. A grave medical risk can give parents reason to order transfer, but the claim of e_1 survives that judgment. The Wards' concern about Type 1 diabetes is understandable; the present polygenic estimate, however, is considerably less determinative than a test for a serious single-gene disorder, and no prediction supplies a general license to abandon another embryo.

A disease-risk comparison and a choice for eye color can employ the same scoring machinery, but their reasons differ. Avoiding substantial foreseeable illness can be argued from the child's good; a preference about appearance ordinarily expresses the chooser's taste. The 2026 physician survey describes a similar difference in attitudes, but cannot establish that normative conclusion. Nor does the difference automatically vindicate PGT-P as presently marketed: professional societies continue to question its clinical readiness.[38]

As the ranking turns toward eye color, stature, or speculative intelligence, what interest of an existing embryo authorizes the choice? The traits are properties of the embryos being compared; they are not goods which the act of selection supplies to any of them. The possibility of loving the child who is eventually born is not disputed. The difficulty concerns the justification of a selection policy which governs the developmental prospects of individuals whose value, on the argument advanced here, precedes their score. Sandel's giftedness argument and Luther's account of the household converge at this point, though from different premises.

The marketed practice brings the question into focus. Scores matter most when embryos compete for transfer opportunities, and some IVF plans anticipate that only part of an existing cohort will ever be transferred. If embryos are created in surplus precisely so that a subset may be ranked and discarded or left indefinitely stored, the exclusionary decision has been built into the plan before scoring begins. Genuine sequential transfer, permanent deferral, destructive research donation, and deliberate destruction are different acts, but the moral claims of an existing embryo are not cancelled by its place on a scorecard. I have argued elsewhere in this journal that terminating a human life God intends is morally grave.[39]

This argument converges with the February 2026 position of Lutherans For Life, a co-publisher of this journal, in condemning practices that deliberately exclude embryos judged unsuitable. But the positions differ in scope: Lutherans For Life also rejects IVF for bypassing the one-flesh design of procreation, whereas the Reception Argument does not establish that general prohibition and can allow medically justified transfer order without equating priority with exclusion. Where embryos are deliberately created in excess of a plan for transfer so that lower-ranked embryos can be eliminated or indefinitely excluded, the fiduciary argument condemns the governing rationale rather than merely requesting more careful ranking. That one selected child may have a higher predicted welfare score cannot answer the prior claims of the others.[40]

9.0 Conclusion

The Wards wanted to spare a future child serious illness, a hope which anyone who has watched a child suffer can understand. Yet the polygenic scorecard poses a problem prior to the question of genetic improvement: several embryos may already exist, and selecting one assigns a developmental opportunity that another does not receive. One is not thereby making an existing embryo genetically better. What justifies the allocation?

Sandel's concern about receptive parenthood, Habermas's concern about a later child's understanding of its origin, and Parfit's non-identity problem remain different arguments. The branching illustration likewise distinguishes numerical persistence from continuity without telling us which individual survives. Their convergence lies in the question each presses upon easy talk of enhancement: which individual is at issue, and what reason has actually been given for acting toward that one?

Christian theology answers first by placing particular embryonic lives within the field of divine address. Luther's *oeconomia* then helps characterize parental authority as administration held in trust, and the fiduciary inference developed here subjects its allocation decisions to the interests of those whose care is at stake. Serious medical risks can furnish relevant reasons for a transfer order; preference for a nonmedical profile does not, without further grounds, do so. Nor can the prediction that one child will fare better be treated as though it cancelled another embryo's claim.

The criticism therefore bears most heavily on a practice that creates embryos with permanent exclusion anticipated. A genuine plan to transfer them in sequence must be judged differently, according to clinical risk, parental capacity, and fair consideration of each embryo. The moral question is not whether parents may use technology. It is whether their authority to care for a child extends to deciding that another existing human life, less well ranked, may be left behind.

A child's good warrants medicine, care, and responsible judgment. Yet a profile is not a person, and parental authority is not a license to make existing persons interchangeable. The market can arrange them on one screen; it cannot determine what one owes to each.

Appendices

Appendix, Argument AN

Take A to mean that an intervention alters inherited human form; N that inherited human form enjoys independent normative privilege; and J that A alone suffices to justify a verdict of moral impermissibility. Let B denote the restricted considerations actually introduced in AN—bare inheritance and its demonstrated malleability, without an independent argument for N. $W_B(\psi)$ means that ψ is warranted on B. This context index matters: lack of warrant on B does not imply that no other evidence could warrant N. AN can be written as a propositional argument about these epistemic claims, but its second premise remains a dialectical judgment concerning B, not a logical consequence of malleability alone:

P1′. $W_B(J) \rightarrow W_B(N)$

P2′. $\neg W_B(N)$ [given only B]

C. $\neg W_B(J)$ [*modus tollens* from P1′ and P2′]

The schema is valid as a conditional inference once its premises are granted. P2′ does not assert ¬N and does not preclude $W_{B'}(N)$ for a richer body of reasons B′. AN defeats the appeal to inheritedness alone; it does not disprove every moral argument against enhancement.

Appendix, Argument AO

Let D(x) mean that x is a determinate beneficiary across the contemplated alternatives; Can(a,m,x) that a can employ intervention m for x at reasonable cost and risk; MRΔW(m,x) that employing m would secure a morally relevant increase in x's expected well-being; and Treats(m) and Enhances(m) the two categories invoked in the parity argument. O(a,m,x) abbreviates the *pro tanto* obligation of agent a to employ m for x. This deontic expression is a schematic predicate, not a complete semantics for obligation. Set $B(a,m,x) := D(x) \wedge Can(a,m,x) \wedge MR\Delta W(m,x)$, and $G(m) := Genetic(m) \vee Reproductive(m)$.

P1*. $\forall a \forall x \forall m[(B(a,m,x) \wedge Treats(m)) \rightarrow O(a,m,x)]$.

P2*. $\forall a \forall x \forall m[(B(a,m,x) \wedge Enhances(m)) \rightarrow O(a,m,x)]$.

P3*. $\exists a \exists x \exists m[G(m) \wedge B(a,m,x) \wedge (Treats(m) \vee Enhances(m))]$.

C1. $\forall a \forall x \forall m[(G(m) \wedge B(a,m,x) \wedge (Treats(m) \vee Enhances(m))) \rightarrow O(a,m,x)]$.

C2. $\exists a \exists x \exists m[G(m) \wedge O(a,m,x)]$.

C1 follows from P1* and P2* by cases on the explicitly stated disjunction; C2 follows from C1 and P3*. The proof does not assume that all interventions are either treatments or enhancements. P3* makes the existential instantiation explicit: it identifies at least one qualifying genetic or reproductive intervention of one of the two kinds covered. None of this entails BP, because AO contains no principle for ranking the lives of different beneficiaries. The classification of treatment and enhancement may be contested, and a preventive measure outside both categories falls outside this schema. The philosophical work lies in defending P2 and applying D(x), not in the validity of the inference.

Appendix, Bridge Principle BP

Let E be a nonempty finite set of available embryos, and $_W$ a fixed ranking of expected well-being of lives anticipated to develop from its members. Suppose, for the simplified case, that $_W$ has a unique maximizer $Best_W(E)$. Write Avail(p,E) for availability to prospective parent p and Reason(p,e,E,C) for a pro tanto reason to choose e from E under C. Reason is a four-place predicate in a schematic, many-sorted regimentation allowing parent and embryo-set variables; it is not the deontic obligation predicate O of AO. No general duty to maximize expected well-being is assumed. This selector compares different prospective lives rather than treating a single fixed beneficiary:

BP. $\forall p \forall E[(Avail(p,E) \wedge Nonempty(E) \wedge UniqueBest_W(E)) \rightarrow Reason(p, Best_W(E), E, C_W)]$.

Here C_W is the criterion-set that induces the ranking $_W$ over prospective lives; it is not the genome of the selected embryo. The notation is schematic and many-sorted, not a claim that ordinary unsorted first-order logic quantifies over literal sets without a theory of membership.

Appendix, Argument AG

Let s(p,C) name the embryo selected for immediate transfer by p under criterion-set C in a case where selection occurs. Let d(e) name a later developmental continuant of e under the stated assumption of singleton development without fission or fusion. Let Rcv(p,x) mean the disposition to receive x without treating x's worth as conditional on a prior specification. Let Alloc(p,e,C) mean that p uses C in assigning a consequential opportunity to embryo e, and let RiskR(p,x) mean that the procedure puts later parental receptivity under risk. RiskR is a contestable normative predicate, not a calculated probability.

The descriptive core is origin-sensitive and explicitly limited:

- $s(p,C) = e_i$
- $e_i \neq e_j \rightarrow d(e_i) \neq d(e_j)$ [an origin-sensitive assumption of this restricted model]
- Alloc(p,e,C) when s(p,C)=e and C materially governs the opportunity assigned to embryo e.

We distinguish an allocation concerning the embryo from its possible expressive effect upon the later child. Let NonMed(C) indicate a nonmedical criterion-set and Decisive(p,e,C) that C materially determined the allocation.

P1. $\forall p \forall x[\text{ProperLove}(p,x) \rightarrow \text{Rcv}(p,x)]$.

P2. $\forall p \forall C \forall e[(\text{NonMed}(C) \wedge s(p,C)=e \wedge \text{Decisive}(p,e,C)) \rightarrow \text{Alloc}(p,e,C)]$.

P3. $\forall p \forall e \forall C[\text{Alloc}(p,e,C) \rightarrow \text{RiskR}(p,d(e))]$.

C. $\forall p \forall C \forall e[(\text{NonMed}(C) \wedge s(p,C)=e \wedge \text{Decisive}(p,e,C)) \rightarrow \text{RiskR}(p,d(e))]$.

C follows from P2 and P3. P1 explains why the risk matters, though it is not needed for formal validity. An allocation may remain justified on other grounds; the fact that a preference-driven selection can place receptivity at risk does not prove a parent's later love conditional. The fiduciary question about embryos themselves is argued separately in AR.

Appendix, Argument AC (notation)

Use the two-world notation Ex(x,w), Gen(e,x,w), and $\text{Better}(x,w_1,w_2)$ for existence, development, and comparative welfare of a *single* individual in two alternatives. The restricted origin-sensitive account adds an explicit origin principle OP, stating that distinct source embryos yield distinct later individuals in the comparison. OP is an additional metaphysical premise rather than a law of logic; without it $x \neq y$ does not follow. A standard person-affecting benefit claim requires:

$\forall x \forall w_1 \forall w_2[\text{Better}(x,w_1,w_2) \rightarrow (\text{Ex}(x,w_1) \wedge \text{Ex}(x,w_2))]$.

The origin-sensitive principle, followed by its application to the case, is:

OP. $\forall e \forall f \forall x \forall y \forall w \forall v[(\text{Gen}(e,x,w) \wedge \text{Gen}(f,y,v) \wedge e \neq f) \rightarrow x \neq y]$.

Case. $\text{Gen}(e_1,x,w_1) \wedge \text{Gen}(e_2,y,w_2) \wedge e_1 \neq e_2$.

Hence $x \neq y$, by OP and the case. The conclusion depends on OP: remove that origin principle and the case does not imply $x \neq y$. OP can be disputed, particularly outside the restricted singleton-development model. AC therefore blocks an unargued transfer of AO *within this comparison model*; it does not prove the origin principle, settle twinning or fusion cases, or itself establish duties toward embryos already formed.

Appendix, Branching and Restricted Consequence

A finite first-order example gives the distinction some teeth. Let the domain consist of temporal stages. Use the signature L = {H,Q,C,S,Sim,h,u,v}. H and Q classify stages as human and posthuman; C(x,y) expresses directed informational continuity; S(x,y) says that stages belong to one numerically persisting individual; and Sim(x,y) means that two stages are simultaneous. S is not logical identity. The constants h, u, and v denote one earlier stage and two later stages. For the proposed branching case, u and v are distinct and simultaneous. This is a structural analogy: its formal domain need not contain embryos, but a pre-twinning organism and two later descendants generate a branching pattern worth comparing.

Let Δ_0 contain $h \neq u$, $h \neq v$, $u \neq v$; H(h), ¬H(u), ¬H(v), Q(u), Q(v); C(h,u), C(h,v); Sim(u,v); and the first-order axioms making S reflexive, symmetric, and transitive. The predicate Sim is interpreted so that Sim(u,v) holds. The theory Δ_0 says nothing about whether stages u and v belong to the same persisting individual. In particular, it does not include ¬S(u,v). That omission matters.

A structure with S interpreted as the universal relation satisfies Δ_0 and makes S(h,u) ∧ S(h,v) true. Thus $\Delta_0 \not\models \neg(S(h,u) \wedge S(h,v))$. Now restrict attention to K, the class of structures in which distinct simultaneous stages cannot both belong to one numerically persisting individual. Write its general constraint as NB: $\forall x \forall y \forall z[(S(x,y) \wedge S(x,z) \wedge Sim(y,z)) \rightarrow y=z]$. Because Δ_0 asserts Sim(u,v) and $u \neq v$, we have $\Delta_0 \models_K \neg(S(h,u) \wedge S(h,v))$. The restriction does work: the inference fails over unrestricted structures but follows over K. Equivalently, $\Delta_0 \cup \{NB\}$ has that consequence in ordinary first-order semantics. The two formulations differ in warrant rather than in logic: writing NB into the theory would treat non-branching as one more descriptive premise, whereas restricting the class of structures marks it as an independently defended constraint on what counts as a model of persistence at all.

Non-branching still does not tell us which successor survives. Three admissible interpretations of S on {h,u,v} remain: identity only (M_0), the partition {h,u}/{v} (M_1), or {h,v}/{u} (M_2). All satisfy Δ_0 within K. The universal bridge C(x,y) → S(x,y), however, is inconsistent with Δ_0 over K, because the given C-relations would force both successors to be numerically continuous with h. The example does not prove which S-relation obtains. In twinning, it clarifies why one earlier embryo cannot be stipulated numerically identical to two later distinct individuals under a non-branching account. It does not settle the moral standing of the earlier organism or the later twins.

Appendix, Argument AR (Reception and Fiduciary Administration)

For a simplified case, let E be a nonempty finite set of existing embryos, p an intending parent, and C a governing criterion-set. Claim(e) means that e has prima facie

moral standing; HouseholdAuth(p,E) says that p has consequential authority over E; Fid(p,E) that the authority is fiduciary. Prio(p,E,C) means that C governs an order of transfer, while Excl(p,E,C) means that it governs permanent exclusion. JustPri and JustExc express justified allocations; SuffPri and SuffExc express reasons sufficient, respectively, for ordering transfer and for permanent exclusion. ProfileOnly(C,E) means a ranking governed solely by parents' preferences for predicted nonmedical traits; ScoreOnly(C,E) means that a comparative score, whether medical or not, is advanced as the sole reason for exclusion. MedGrave(C,E) means that C tracks a serious and reasonably predictable risk of grave illness; RelevantPri(C,E) means that such risk is relevant to a fair ordering, without prejudging the final judgment. These are schematic, typed predicates. The theological warrant for Claim, and the normative grounds for the sufficiency predicates, lie in the argument's prose rather than in logic.

P1. $\forall e(e \in E \rightarrow \text{Claim}(e))$.

P2. $\text{HouseholdAuth}(p,E) \rightarrow \text{Fid}(p,E)$.

P3a. $[\text{Fid}(p,E) \wedge \forall e(e \in E \rightarrow \text{Claim}(e)) \wedge \text{Prio}(p,E,C)] \rightarrow [\text{JustPri}(p,E,C) \rightarrow \text{SuffPri}(C,E)]$.

P3b. $[\text{Fid}(p,E) \wedge \forall e(e \in E \rightarrow \text{Claim}(e)) \wedge \text{Excl}(p,E,C)] \rightarrow [\text{JustExc}(p,E,C) \rightarrow \text{SuffExc}(C,E)]$.

P4. $\text{ProfileOnly}(C,E) \rightarrow \neg\text{SuffPri}(C,E)$.

P5. $\text{MedGrave}(C,E) \rightarrow \text{RelevantPri}(C,E)$.

P6. $\text{ScoreOnly}(C,E) \rightarrow \neg\text{SuffExc}(C,E)$.

C1. $[\text{HouseholdAuth}(p,E) \wedge \text{Prio}(p,E,C) \wedge \text{ProfileOnly}(C,E)] \rightarrow \neg\text{JustPri}(p,E,C)$.

C2. $[\text{HouseholdAuth}(p,E) \wedge \text{Excl}(p,E,C) \wedge \text{ScoreOnly}(C,E)] \rightarrow \neg\text{JustExc}(p,E,C)$.

Given the typed reading, both conclusions follow. P2 is required: without the fiduciary characterization, the conditional duties in P3a and P3b are not triggered. P1 supplies standing rather than the result of a particular allocation. P4 and P6 are contestable normative premises; their support lies in the fiduciary analysis and cannot be extracted from AC's origin-sensitive identity principle alone. P5 records the relevance of serious medical reasons, not their automatic sufficiency: proportionality, maternal risk, and competing embryonic claims remain to be judged. This is a conditional regimentation of a theological argument, and its value is to show where philosophical and theological disagreement must occur.

***Verba Vitae*'s General Editor Dennis Bielfeldt** *founded the Institute of Lutheran Theology and serves as Chancellor and Professor of Philosophical Theology at its Christ School of Theology. Having taught previously at Bethany College, Grand View University, and Iowa State University, Rev. Bielfeldt is currently Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at South Dakota State University, holding an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Iowa. He has published books and many articles in academic journals and encyclopedias.*

Notes

1. Rob Stein, "These Companies Help Parents Try to Pick Their Babies' Traits. Experts Are Wary," NPR, May 6, 2026. Stein reports that Christian Ward, who has Type 1 diabetes, signed up for Nucleus Genomics primarily to reduce the risk of the disease in a future child, and that Nucleus marketed both disease-risk and nonmedical-trait predictions. The report does not establish that the Wards had already selected among scored embryos.
2. Theresa A. Grebe et al., "Clinical Utility of Polygenic Risk Scores for Embryo Selection: A Points to Consider Statement of the American College of Medical Genetics and Genomics (ACMG)," *Genetics in Medicine* 26, no. 4 (2024): 101052, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gim.2023.101052; Ethics Committee of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine and Practice Committee of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, "Use of Preimplantation Genetic Testing for Polygenic Disorders (PGT-P): An Ethics Committee Opinion," *Fertility and Sterility* 125, no. 1 (2026): 24–30, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fertnstert.2025.10.023; Rémy A. Furrer et al., "Decision-Making Criteria in Polygenic Embryo Screening: A Survey of Reproductive Medicine Physicians," *Genetics in Medicine* 28, no. 8 (2026): 102631, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gim.2026.102631.
3. Julian Huxley, "Transhumanism," in *New Bottles for New Wine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 13–17; Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought," *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 1–25.
4. Max More, "The Philosophy of Transhumanism," in *The Transhumanist Reader*, ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 3–17, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118555927.ch1. More's earlier "Transhumanism: Toward a Futurist Philosophy" appeared separately in *Extropy* 6 (1990): 6–12.
5. Nick Bostrom, "Human Genetic Enhancements: A Transhumanist Perspective," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 37, no. 4 (2003): 493–506, 493, https://doi.org/10.1023/B:INQU.0000019037.67783.d5.
6. For the restricted-context warrant analysis, including the explicitly indexed W_B predicates and a *modus tollens* derivation, see Appendix, Argument AN. The restriction prevents an inference from lack of warrant on one stated basis to lack of warrant on every possible basis.
7. Nick Bostrom, "In Defense of Posthuman Dignity," *Bioethics* 19, no. 3 (2005): 202–214, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8519.2005.00437.x.
8. Julian Savulescu, "Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children," *Bioethics* 15, nos. 5–6 (2001): 413–426, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8519.00251; Julian Savulescu, "New Breeds of Humans: The Moral Obligation to Enhance," *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* 10, suppl. 1 (2005): 36–39, https://doi.org/10.1016/

S1472-6483(10)62202-X; Julian Savulescu and Nick Bostrom, eds., *Human Enhancement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

9. Nick Bostrom, *Deep Utopia: Life and Meaning in a Solved World* (Washington, DC: Ideapress, 2024); Timnit Gebru and Émile P. Torres, "The TESCREAL Bundle: Eugenics and the Promise of Utopia through Artificial General Intelligence," *First Monday* 29, no. 4 (2024), https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v29i4.13636. Here extropianism names the futurist program associated especially with Max More and the Extropy Institute, emphasizing open-ended improvement through reason, technology, and deliberate self-transformation. Singularitarianism is the expectation that accelerating technological development, often centered on artificial general intelligence, will culminate in a technological singularity beyond which ordinary projections about human society become unreliable. Cosmism places human or posthuman development within a cosmic horizon, often joining radical life extension, space expansion, and the large-scale transformation of intelligence.
10. Michael J. Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), esp. 45–62, 85–100.
11. Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).
12. Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), esp. 51–52, 57–76.
13. Nicholas Agar, *Humanity's End: Why We Should Reject Radical Enhancement* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010).
14. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), part IV.
15. For the standard distinction between proof and satisfaction, see Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," in *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics*, 2nd ed., trans. J. H. Woodger (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 152–278; Wilfrid Hodges, *A Shorter Model Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–10. Soundness and completeness connect syntactic derivability and semantic consequence for first-order logic.
16. Dennis Bielfeldt, *The Logic of Faith: Model Theory and the Meaning of Theology*, chap. 5, manuscript submitted to Cascade Books, 2026. The chapter develops the sequence semantic satisfaction, admissibility, comparative adequacy, and truth, with comparative adequacy supplying defeasible warrant for assertion rather than constituting truth.
17. Robert Merrihew Adams, "Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity," *Journal of Philosophy* 76, no. 1 (1979): 5–26; Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). The same numerical-identity problem becomes even sharper in bodily resurrection, where the identity claim must cross a rupture in ordinary biological and psychological continuity; see n. 23 below.
18. Dennis Bielfeldt, "Teleo-Spaces: Differentiated Possibility, Normative Weighting, and the Ontology of Intelligibility," working paper, substantially revised 2026, https://www.academia.edu/164598090/Teleo_Spaces_Differentiated_Possibility_Normative_Weighting_and_the_Ontology_of_Intelligibility.
19. Dennis Bielfeldt, "Personal Identity, Divine Love, and Extrinsic Individuation," *Verba Vitae* 1, nos. 3–4 (2024): 21–44. The working papers cited in the notes that follow extend that argument, but its core, namely the failure of intrinsic principles of individuation for persons and the case for grounding personal identity in divine intentionality, is set out and defended there.

20. The address model shares a family resemblance with dialogical and relational personalism—Martin Buber's I–Thou, Karl Barth's account of the human being as covenant partner, John Zizioulas' being as communion, and Robert W. Jenson's narrative account of personal identity—though it grounds non-substitutability specifically in Trinitarian address rather than in encounter or communion as such. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970); Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, *The Doctrine of Creation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960); John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

21. Dennis Bielfeldt, "Counting Is Downstream from Love: Divine Address and the Ground of Individuation," Theological Metaphysics Study Paper in Philosophical Theology, substantially revised July 2026, https://www.academia.edu/165167583/Counting_Is_Downstream_from_Love_Divine_Address_and_the_Ground_of_Individuation; Dennis Bielfeldt, "Particularity, Intelligibility, and the Ground of Teleo-Spaces," working paper, revised 2026, https://www.academia.edu/164543428/Particularity_Intelligibility_and_the_Ground_of_Teleo_Spaces_Differentiated_Possibility_Trinitarian_Grammar_and_the_Ontology_of_Addressability.

22. Bielfeldt, "Counting Is Downstream from Love." The argument distinguishes numerical distinctness from personal non-substitutability: countability by itself does not explain why the absence of this one cannot be made good by another sufficiently similar instance.

23. The resurrection analogy concerns numerical identity, not merely exact similarity. Christian resurrection claims are not satisfied by a qualitatively exact successor: the one raised must be numerically the one who died, and the paradigm is the crucified Jesus, not a successor answering to his description. If death interrupts organismic integration and psychological process, neither sameness of matter nor remembered profile by itself fixes that identity. For the contemporary debate, see Peter van Inwagen, "The Possibility of Resurrection," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9, no. 2 (1978): 114–21; Dean W. Zimmerman, "The Compatibility of Materialism and Survival: The 'Falling Elevator' Model," *Faith and Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (1999): 194–212; and Trenton Merricks, "The Resurrection of the Body," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 476–90. On divine regard for the unborn, see the discussion of Psalm 139:13–16, Jeremiah 1:5, and Luke 1:41–44 below; those texts do not themselves settle every modern question about an embryo's persistence through twinning.

24. On the classical background and Luther's use of *oeconomia*, see Timothy Shaun Price, "Luther's Use of Aristotle in the Three Estates and Its Implications for Understanding *Oeconomia*," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 18, no. 2 (2015): 373–389.

25. For a concise account of Luther's three estates as overlapping spheres of human life rather than social classes, see Oswald Bayer, "Nature and Institution: Luther's Doctrine of the Three Orders," *Lutheran Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1998): 125–159; repr. in *Freedom in Response: Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies*, trans. Jeffrey F. Cayzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 90–118.

26. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883–2009), 42:79.3–20; 87.11–40 (hereafter WA); *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia

Publishing House, 1958), 104–105, 115–118 (hereafter LW). The controlling WA text reads, "Haec est institutio Ecclesiae, antequam esset Oeconomia et Politia" and, after the institution of the church, "etiam Oeconomia constituitur"; at WA 42:79.20, "Oeconomiae administratio est demandata." The English discussion in the text follows the sense of LW rather than presenting a new translation.

27. Martin Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* (1528), WA 26:504.30–505.10; LW 37:364–365. Luther describes the three hierarchies and the concrete duties of home, city, and church.

28. Martin Luther, *Disputationes circulatim expediendae* (1539), known editorially as the "Zirkulardisputation," WA 39/2:42.1–4; 52.5–23; 53.1–4; LW New Series, vol. 72, *Disputations I* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2024), 580–626. Thesis 52 reads, "Tres enim hierarchias ordinavit Deus." The preface/report material adds, "Quamvis magistratus et oeconomia etiam sint humanae ordinationes, attamen habent testimonium Dei." Translations in the text are mine; the complete disputation is available in English in LW 72.

29. Martin Luther, *Large Catechism* (1529), Fourth Commandment, WA 30 I:152.19–29; 156.9–17; 156.27–31; *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 400–410. The *Large Catechism* is not printed as a standalone work in the original fifty-five-volume American Edition; accordingly, the English parallel is cited from the *Book of Concord* rather than attaching an inexact LW reference. The WA text at 156.27–31 says that God has given children and commanded parents to raise and govern them according to his will.

30. On early Lutheran development of household ethics, see Justus Menius, *Oeconomia Christiana* (Wittenberg: Hans Lufft, 1529), with Luther-related material in WA 30 II:62–63; Price, "Luther's Use of Aristotle," 373–389; Niels Henrik Gregersen, "From Oeconomia to Nordic Welfare Societies: The Idea of a Third-Zone Lutheranism," *Theology Today* 76, no. 3 (2019): 224–232.

31. On the later development and contested historical baggage of "orders of creation," see Taylor D. Holleyman, "The Orders of Vocation: A Brunnerian Proposal," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 25, no. 1 (2023): 114–133, https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12571; Bayer, "Nature and Institution." The nineteenth- and twentieth-century doctrine should not simply be read back into Luther without qualification.

32. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, WA 42:50.25–33 (LW 1:67) on *industria et ars*; WA 42:78.20–40 (LW 1:102–103) on human work and custody before the Fall; WA 42:82.41–83.12 (LW 1:108–109) on the command given to innocent Adam; and WA 42:115.35–40 (LW 1:153), where the temptation is cast as the invalid inference, "Deus dedit vobis omnia ... Ergo una haec arbor vobis non est prohibita." Extensive dominion and real creaturely limits therefore coexist.

33. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, WA 42:90.10–34; 100.22–31; 101.40–41; 102.12–24; 103.7–16; cf. LW 1:119, 133–139. The WA text says that Adam does not take Eve "ex suo arbitrio" but waits for God to bring her; Eve is "offertur ... ab ipso Deo"; Adam is "paratus ... ad Heuam suscipiendam" and then "agnoscit eam." Luther also expounds Adam's naming her Ischa/Virago. Translations in the text are mine.

34. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, WA 42:354.31–37 (LW 2:131); 580.26–39 (cf. LW 3:42–47); 643.40–41 (LW 3:134). The relevant phrases are "prolem esse donum Dei," "tanquam Dei donum liberos amplectuntur," "cum proles datur, aedificatur domus, et recte constituitur Oeconomia," and "liberi sint Dei donum." Translations in the text are mine.

35. Luther, *Large Catechism*, WA 30 I:156.27–31; *Book of Concord*, 410; and Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, WA 42:95.25–35; LW 1:127. For the latter passage, LW translates the point that the God who formed the first human from earth still creates human beings through parental generation.

36. Martin Luther, "Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage" (1542), WA 53:205–8; LW 43:247–50.

37. Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 52. His presumption of consent concerns therapeutic genetic intervention. Its application here to the order of transfer among existing embryos is a constructive analogy, not a claim that Habermas directly addresses embryo ranking.

38. Furrer et al., "Decision-Making Criteria in Polygenic Embryo Screening," 102631. The surveyed reproductive medicine physicians were substantially more willing to consider polygenic embryo screening for serious medical conditions than for nonmedical traits.

39. Bielfeldt, "Personal Identity, Divine Love, and Extrinsic Individuation," 39.

40. Lutherans For Life, "In vitro Fertilization," in *Position Statements of Lutherans For Life* (Nevada, IA: Lutherans For Life, updated July 27, 2026), 24. The statement was adopted February 16, 2026. Where all embryos are genuinely intended for subsequent transfer, scores may change priority without proving that any embryo has been deliberately excluded. The practical ethics differ where a protocol creates or ranks more embryos than the parents plan to transfer, knowing that some will remain indefinitely stored or be destroyed. Both intentions and reasonably foreseeable outcomes deserve independent assessment.

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