

relationships, etc.) he or she is — so this thinking goes — not a person and need not be protected as such. Sadly, we do live in a culture that tends to evaluate people on what they do, on the contribution they make, rather than on simply having value because they are people, made in the image of God and, therefore, of infinite value. One of the many problems associated with functionalism is that it puts the weak and defenseless at the mercy of the healthy and strong.

Functionalism is false because it misunderstands the basic notion of causality. In order for a thing to act like a person it must first be a person. For if it acted like a person without being one, where did the capacity to act *come* from — thin air? Functionalism is essentially unscientific for it believes that things can happen without being caused to happen. Functionalism also puts one in the dangerous position of being willing / able to consider an entire group of human beings as outside the protection of the law because they do not count as persons. Humans have been down this road before and it never ends well.

“Hard cases”

It has already been noted that abortions performed in difficult circumstances account for only a small percentage of the abortions done in this country. The dilemma here is often cast as being between the pro-lifer who cares only for the child and the “pro-choicer” who is compassionate towards the woman. The presupposition is that abortion actually helps a woman. The reality, however, is very different — at least in the case of pregnancy through rape. As women are beginning to speak out about their experience of abortion, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the woman who becomes pregnant through rape and chooses to abort is often burdened with two recoveries: recovering from the trauma of rape and recovering from the trauma of having chosen to take the life of her child.

God has something to say about the issue, too

Up until this point, I have been attempting to make arguments that are primarily based on reason. One does not need to be a Christian or even a theist to see the serious problems with the arguments often given to support abortion. I would like to turn for a moment to consider a specifically Christian response. God says in the book of the prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (Jer 1:5; cf. Ps 139:13–16). For Christians and other theists, to deliberately end a pregnancy is to interfere with God’s work.

Throughout Scripture, both Old and New Testament, children are regarded as a joy and a blessing from God,

never as a burden or a curse (see, e.g., Ps 72:16; 113:9; 127:3–5). Child sacrifice is constantly condemned (e.g., Lev 18:21; Deut 12:31; 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chron 28:3; Ps 106:37–38; Ezek 16:20–21). While the New Testament does not contain any explicit mention of abortion, it presupposes that preborn children are persons who should not be murdered (e.g., Mt 1:18; 24:19; Lk 1:15; 1:44; 2:5; Rom 9:10; Gal 1:15).

A very early Christian document, the *Didache*, does specifically forbid abortion. Written in AD 95 as an instruction to new Christians, it explicitly states that those who become Christians are to have nothing to do with abortion. More fundamentally, Jesus Himself sets a standard that whatever we do to the least of His brothers and sisters we do to Him (cf. Mt 25:40). What we permit to happen to the preborn we permit to happen to Jesus! If you are a “pro-choice” Christian, what will you say to Jesus on judgment day when He asks about your donations to pro-life causes, your support in prayer and presence at pro-life vigils and rallies, and your voting record? What will you say to God?

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Prayer of consecration to Jesus

God our Father, I believe that out of Your infinite love You have created me. In a thousand ways I have shunned Your love. I repent of each and every one of my sins. Please forgive me.

Thank you for sending your Son to die for me, to save me from eternal death. I choose this day to renew my covenant with you and to place Jesus at the center of my heart. I surrender to him as Lord over my whole life and over all things.

I ask you now to flood my heart and soul with the Gift of Your Holy Spirit and to grant me the gift of new life. Give me the grace and courage to live as a missionary disciple for the rest of my days. Amen.

Abortion: a Right or a Wrong?



St. Paul
Street Evangelization

The Issue

Abortion remains, in our country, an enduring “hot button” issue. It is difficult to imagine an issue, save perhaps the redefinition of marriage, over which there is more heat and less light. I will offer some simple facts that are not at issue, and then raise and answer some objections often proposed by those who wish to keep abortion legal.

Biology 101

Some basic facts of biology can help to orient our discussion. From the moment of conception, the preborn child is genetically distinct from his or her mother. The heart starts beating at eighteen days after conception — usually before a woman knows that she is pregnant. Brain waves have been recorded at forty days. Most abortions occur after this point.

Little-known facts

Many do not realize that abortion is legal for *all nine months* of pregnancy in the USA. While some procedures have become illegal, there has been no limitation on when an abortion may be performed. Abortion happens approximately 4,000 times a day in this country: just under 1.3 million per year. Many who support the legality of abortion for “hard cases” do not realize that only about 1–2% of all abortions occur in these difficult circumstances: rape, incest, and cases where the life of the mother is at risk.

Few realize that in many states there are more regulations surrounding ear piercing than there are surrounding abortion. Abortion clinics often are subject to no regulations at all and have never been inspected by the local health board.

“It’s my body ...”

Let’s turn our attention to some of the common objections raised against pro-life arguments. First, some like to say, “It’s a woman’s body and she can do what she wants.” From a legal perspective this statement is simply false. Both men and women are not permitted to do many things to or with their bodies. Men and women may not sell themselves as prostitutes. They may not ingest certain illegal drugs. They may not sell themselves into slavery. Merely because it is her body does not mean (considered apart from the *legality* of abortion) that a woman may do as she pleases to or with it.

Furthermore, this is scientifically false. It is admitted in every science textbook on embryology that a new body comes into existence at the moment of conception. This body is genetically distinct from the mother’s (and of a different gender in half of all cases). As the saying goes, “My right to swing my fist ends at the tip of your nose.”

So, too, a woman’s right over her body ends where her preborn child’s body begins.

“You can’t legislate morality”

Even on its face, it is absurd to say that morality can’t be legislated. Every law is, in the end, a legislative declaration that the prohibited behavior is bad or wrong. We have laws against murder, theft, rape, slander, etc., because society agrees they are morally wrong. Some may contend that these things are wrong because they do real harm to others. Below, we will take a closer look at whether the preborn child is a “real other.”

Others raise the objection that if abortion is illegal we will simply have a rise in so-called “back alley” or illegal abortions. For the sake of argument, let us presume this to be true. Why is it relevant? Murder, theft, and rape are all illegal and they all still happen. Does the questioner propose that in the absence of perfect enforcement all laws should be lifted because the bad acts are going to happen anyway?

We have laws, not because everyone will follow them, but so that the majority will be discouraged from engaging in the illegal behavior and so that those who break the laws may be apprehended and punished. Presumably there are fewer murders, thefts, and rapes because they are illegal. The fact that we do not prevent all evil acts does not prevent us from trying to prevent as *many as we can*.

“Personally opposed” or “pro-choice” rhetoric

Some wish to remove themselves from the debate entirely and hope to find a way to thread the needle when they say, “I am personally opposed to abortion but believe it should be a woman’s choice.” If there are no moral objections to abortion, if abortion is in fact good or at least ethically or morally neutral, it’s puzzling why anyone would be “personally opposed” to it. Personal opposition implies that the speaker thinks that there is, in fact, something wrong with abortion.

The statement also implies a distinction between support for the ability to choose and support for that which is chosen. This raises the deeper and more philosophical, cultural question of the nature of freedom. Is a person free so that they can do whatever they want or is a person free so that they can freely choose the good and thus be rewarded for that free choice?

Stepping back from deep philosophy, let’s consider the more basic issue of whether it is possible to distinguish between the ability to choose and that which is chosen. For example, if we go out to dinner at a fine restaurant, and the waiter approaches and asks what we choose for dinner, it would be foolish to respond simply, “I choose.”

Choosing is a transitive verb. It needs a direct object — we choose something. If we choose steak for dinner and the waiter responds, “Excellent choice,” he’s not praising the fact that we have made a choice, but that we have chosen something he regards as a *good* thing to choose. So, too, in the case of abortion, one cannot simply champion a right to choose without paying attention to that which is chosen.

What is perhaps unique and quite curious about this argument is that it is only used on the issue of abortion. The problem becomes readily apparent when we substitute any other issue in place of abortion. No one says, for example, “I am personally opposed to bank robbery but believe it should be a robber’s choice.” One opposes the choice of bank robbery not because one is opposed to freedom but because to choose to rob a bank is wrong. To support such a choice is to support bank robbery.

Analogously, if one supports a woman’s right to choose, one is supporting what the woman chooses: an abortion. Thus, the “pro-choice” position is not a middle way between pro-life and pro-abortion. When analyzed in this way, the pro-choice position is not functionally different from the pro-abortion stand.

“The unborn child is not yet a person”

Some have sought to introduce a distinction that would undermine all that has been stated above. On this basis, abortion would be acceptable because no one is getting hurt, since the preborn child is not a someone. Rhetorically, this is most commonly done by misusing the term *fetus*: as if the term identifies a *kind* of being rather than a *stage* of being. By this thinking, we can have a cat, a dog, a *fetus*, and a human being. However, the scientific reality is that fetus (from the Latin, meaning, literally, *offspring*) designates a stage of development. Thus, we have fetal cats, fetal dogs, and fetal human beings. Just as it is wrong to kill an infant human being or an adolescent human being, so it is wrong to kill a fetal human being.

Like the previous argument, this one, too, taps into some deeper philosophical issues. Some argue that human persons have rights and standing before the law, but that not all human beings are persons. The argument maintains that the preborn are certainly living human beings, so that to take their life is to end a human life, but they are not persons and therefore not protected by law.

The underlying premise for this argument is what is called “functionalism.” It holds that a human being is a person depending on whether he or she functions or acts like one. Since the preborn child does none of the things we associate with personhood (free will choices, loving