

THREE THOUGHTS ON ABORTION

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I. Not My Body, Not My Choice

It is the other within the mother. It has its own DNA, its own blood type, its own sex, its own body type, skin tone, eye color, and eventually all the features that make it a distinct individual. Choice does come into the picture; it comes in the mother's behaviors prior to the pregnancy. We have no right to take out on the baby our own sexual irresponsibility.

As we say with other physical matters, "go with the science."

II. The Safety of Pregnancies

Exceptional cases include rape, incest, the life of the mother, and perhaps some other highly detrimental physical circumstance. Psychological negatives may have to be dealt with by counseling, medical assistance, or adoption.

"Hard cases make bad law." We do not use unusual situations to set the procedures for normal ones. What makes situations unusual does not exist in typical cases. We do need to deal sensitively with such cases, and decisions about them must lie first with the mother in consultation with medical professionals. Physicians are in a better position to know what will be dysfunctional without the "heroic efforts" terminally ill patients can sign away.

If the mother's life is at stake, allowing an abortion avoids losing the mother too. If the fetus has died, the situation does not involve taking a life. Other exceptional cases may come to light as well, but modern medical expertise reduces the number of circumstances where the life of the baby or the mother is at stake.

In the case of rape or incest, abortion is a form of self-defense. People have a right to defend themselves against abuse; a woman has a right to defend herself against what her attacker has done to her. In principle, rape should be as subject to capital punishment for the rapist as murdering a victim is. That is the psychological effect on the woman as well as the physical effect on what is conceived. Guilt is personal, so the assailant bears the guilt of what it takes to rectify what he has caused.

III. Abortion as the Baby's Experience

It's the baby, not the mother, that feels the pain in the cases of "the silent scream," especially with abortions that dismember the baby. The procedure is not like removing a defective kidney or amputating a leg infected with gangrene. The vast majority of abortions do not deal with dysfunctional fetuses, and the fetus is not part of the mother. Particularly heinous is the depersonalizing practice of harvesting body parts for profit; it is a form of self-centeredness, which is the essence of immorality.

Euthanizing the preborn does not differ from euthanasia generally, and it happens without the consent of the victim and aside from the "hard cases" associated with the euthanasia issue

itself. Ahead of time, terminally ill patients or those with the power of attorney to act for them can sign away the use of “heroic efforts” to prolong their life that cannot recover; so to speak, the mother has the “power of attorney” to act on behalf of the unviable fetus that is within her.

Except in the “hard cases,” abortion sets aside “reverence for human life,” especially in cases of near-term and full-term abortions. Aborting what could live outside the womb is the same as the infanticide practiced by ancient (and modern) pagans. Not location but viability establishes the moral circumstance; it is infanticide in either case.

Admittedly, the early stages of fetal development do not involve viability aside from total dependence on the mother. But the fact that the “person in progress” is not self-sufficient does not justify ending the pregnancy any more than killing a two-year-old does. Reliance on other people continues in decreasing degrees even up into adulthood; murdering an adult in principle is no different in kind than killing a preborn baby; it is a matter of degree all the way along. Prohibiting the former while advocating the latter illustrates lack of perception; it reveals self-centeredness.

Three final notes:

(a) the “adoption option” exists as an amoral alternative to abortion; there is no real need to invoke abortion to solve even a perceived burden that is unbearable under the circumstances.

(b) Abortion is not for population control; there are other ways of maintaining reasonable population levels.

(c) Abortion as a general practice is one more departure from interpersonalism as the highest frame of reference for human life and living.