

Unmasking the False Dichotomy in the Abortion Debate In Defense of the Empowerment of Women and the Entitlement of the Preborn

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to provide clarity on the moral issue of abortion from three important inter-related perspectives: science, philosophy and law. From each of these perspectives, this paper tries to articulate the moral concerns both of mother and the preborn without prematurely dismissing other opinions that lay emphasis almost exclusively either on the rights of women or of the preborn. Careful analysis of diverse opinions and arguments is made to make a singular and significant point: the abortion debate has been trapped within the either-or dichotomy which forces us to choose between the rights of women and those of the preborn. This approach has dominated the abortion debate for decades without proper scrutiny of this very dichotomy. An attempt is made in this paper to show that this dichotomy is false and there is a need to inscribe the abortion debate within the paradigm of 'both...and.' Thus this paper argues that choosing not to interrupt pregnancy voluntarily is a choice made in favour *both* of women *and* the preborn. It is a moral choice that one makes *both* for the empowerment of women *and* the entitlement of the preborn.

Keywords

abortion, preborn, fetus, personhood, rights, empowerment, dichotomy.

Introduction

Among the many important issues of bioethics, abortion¹ is certainly one of the oldest and most universal issues where even traditional approaches show strong divergences. The ethical debate on abortion cuts across three important academic disciplines: Science, Philosophy and Law. Usually debates about abortion focus on politics and law: should abortion be outlawed and treated like the murder of a human person, or remain a legal choice available to all women? Behind the debates are more fundamental ethical questions which aren't always given the specific attention they deserve. Some believe that the law should not enforce morality, but all good law is based upon moral values. A failure to openly discuss those values can obscure important discussions. In this essay on the ethics of abortion, we shall first deal with the questions from the field of biological science related to abortion, then move on to philosophical and legal questions. While discussing the legal aspects of arguments, we shall pay special attention to the Indian scenario.

1. Arguing from Science

Abortion is an emotionally complex issue, stacked with distressing circumstances that elicit our sympathy and compassion, but abortion is not morally complex: If the preborn are not human beings equally worthy of our compassion and support, no justification for abortion is required. However, if the preborn has human life, no justification for abortion is morally adequate, if such a reason cannot justify ending the life of a toddler or any born human in similar circumstances. Hence we need to turn to the facts provided by biological science to see if the preborn is a living human being. In this section, we shall first briefly look at what science has to say about the fetus, whether it is a living organism or not and then discuss how with the knowledge of biological science we can unmistakably deduce that the fetus is a human being.

1.1 Fetus as a Living Organism

Biological science is not in any way unclear about the beginning of human life - it starts at the moment of conception. The moment a human sperm penetrates a human ovum, or egg, generally in the

upper portion of the Fallopian Tube, a new entity comes into existence. “Fertilization is an important landmark because, under ordinary circumstances, a new, genetically distinct human organism is thereby formed...”²

“[The zygote], formed by the union of an oocyte and a sperm, is the beginning of a new human being.”³ Zygote is the name of the first cell formed at conception, the earliest developmental stage of the human embryo, followed by the “Morula” and “Blastocyst” stages.⁴ A zygote is the beginning of a new human being. “Human development begins at fertilization when a sperm fuses with the oocyte to form a single cell called a zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marks the beginning of each of us as a unique individual.”⁵ The zygote is composed of human DNA and other human molecules, so its nature is undeniably human and not some other species.

The new human zygote has a genetic composition that is absolutely unique by itself, different from any other human that has ever existed. It has its own unique genetic human signature that is different from that of either of its parents. This shows that it is clearly not additional tissue mass belonging to the mother. The genetic material in each cell of the developing embryo has a unique identity separate from the mother’s. This disproves the claim that what is involved in abortion is merely “a woman and her body.”

This DNA includes a complete “design,” guiding not only early development but even hereditary attributes that will appear in childhood and adulthood, from hair and eye color to personality traits.⁶ As well as being separate and unique, a fertilized embryo is ontologically no different than a human toddler, adolescent, or adult. Nothing is added to or taken away from the embryo except food and waste products (which is no different from any human being). At no point does the embryo undergo any fundamental, ontological change after conception; it simply grows and develops just like a toddler grows and develops.

It is also quite clear that the earliest human embryo is biologically alive and is a living organism. “The property or quality that

distinguishes living organisms from dead organisms and inanimate matter, manifested in functions such as metabolism, growth, reproduction, and response to stimuli or adaptation to the environment originating from within the organism.”⁷ The human embryo fulfills the four criteria needed to establish biological life: metabolism, growth, reaction to stimuli, and reproduction.⁸ Is the human zygote merely a new kind of cell or is it a human organism; that is, a human being? Scientists define an organism as a complex structure of interdependent elements constituted to carry on the activities of life by separately-functioning but mutually dependant organs. The human zygote meets this definition with ease. Once formed, it initiates a complex sequence of events to ready it for continued development and growth. The zygote acts immediately and decisively to initiate a program of development that will, if uninterrupted by accident, disease, or external intervention, proceed seamlessly through formation of the definitive body, birth, childhood, adolescence, maturity, and aging, ending with death. This coordinated behavior is the very hallmark of an organism. By contrast, while a mere collection of human cells may carry on the activities of cellular life, it will not exhibit coordinated interactions directed towards a higher level of organization.⁹

1.2 Not Just Fetus but Human Fetus

Milestones of human development begin early. For example, the human heart begins to form 18 days after conception and exhibits a measurable heart beat at 21-24 days.¹⁰ The brain begins to form at this time and produces measurable brain waves at day 40.¹¹ Contrary to some daring claims of pro-abortion advocates, the fetus at the point of abortion is not just a “blob of tissue” to be described in terms of small size or weight. Even in early abortions, the fetus has all the parts of a human being. Contrary to what many believe, human beings are not constructed in the womb - they develop. In fact, all the major organ systems are initiated within the first three weeks after conception. The process of embryonic development is a continuous process, with no

obvious point at which the fetus magically becomes a “person.” In fact, the development process continues well after birth, including many characteristics that determine our personality or personhood.

Thus, it is an error to claim, “It’s not a human, it’s a fetus.” That would be like saying, “It’s not a human, it’s an infant,” or, “It’s not a human, it’s an adolescent.” These are category fallacies. The proper answer to these assertions would be, “Sure it’s a fetus, sure it’s an infant, and sure it’s an adolescent. It’s a human fetus, a human infant, and a human adolescent.” These are simply stages of development in the human life cycle. A human starts as an embryo, becomes a fetus, is born an infant, develops into a child, grows into an adolescent, matures into adulthood, and eventually dies. Scientifically, there is no good reason to believe a human being is created at birth, because nothing is created at birth. At birth, a fetus simply changes location and changes its mode of acquiring food and dispensing waste, but at no point does it become something entirely new or different. Life begins at conception and proceeds through its stages until death. From the moment of conception, the preborn are human beings.

Scientific evidence is quite plain: the moment the fusion of the human sperm and egg takes place, a new entity comes into existence which is distinctly human, alive, and an individual organism – a living, and fully human, being.¹² Thus from medical science, we can conclude that human life begins at conception and proceeds rapidly thereafter. Even the advocates of abortion concede this simple fact. Faye Wattleton, the longest reigning president of the largest abortion provider in the United States – Planned Parenthood – said the following in an interview with *Ms. Magazine*: “I think we have deluded ourselves into believing that people don’t know that abortion is killing. So any pretense that abortion is not killing is a signal of our ambivalence, a signal that we cannot say yes, it kills a fetus.”¹³ Ann Furedi, the chief executive of the largest independent abortion provider in the UK, said this in a 2008 debate: “We can accept that the embryo is a living thing in the fact that it has a beating heart, that it has its own genetic system within it. It’s clearly human in the sense that it’s not a gerbil, and we can recognize that it is human.

Naomi Wolf, a prominent feminist author and abortion supporter, makes a similar point when she states that “we need to contextualize the fight to defend abortion rights within a moral framework that admits that the death of a fetus is a real death.”¹⁵ Peter Singer, contemporary philosopher and public abortion advocate, makes this startling admission when he writes that “there is no doubt that from the first moments of its existence an embryo conceived from human sperm and eggs is a human being.”¹⁶

Bernard Nathanson co-founded one of the most influential abortion advocacy groups in the world (NARAL) and once served as medical director for the largest abortion clinic in America. In 1974, he wrote an article for the *New England Journal of Medicine* in which he states, “There is no longer serious doubt in my mind that human life exists within the womb from the very onset of pregnancy...”¹⁷ Some years later, he would reiterate: “There is simply no doubt that even the early embryo is a human being. All its genetic coding and all its features are indisputably human. As to being, there is no doubt that it exists, is alive, is self-directed, and is not the same being as the mother – and is therefore a unified whole.”¹⁸

Science concludes that abortion kills, but is it murder? Prominent defenders of abortion rights publicly admit that abortion kills human beings. They are not saying that abortion is morally defensible because it doesn’t kill a distinct human entity. They are admitting that abortion does kill a distinct human entity, but argue it is morally defensible anyway. They base their arguments either on the philosophical notion of personhood or on the right of a woman over her body. We shall then discuss these two arguments from a philosophical point of view.

2. Philosophical Perspectives

In this section we shall focus on two important philosophical notions person and right. The question of personhood leaves the realm of science for that of philosophy and ethics. Science defines what the preborn is; it cannot define our obligations toward her. After all, the preborn is a very different human entity

than those we see around us. Should a smaller, less developed, differently located and dependent being be entitled to rights of personhood and life? Or should the right of the mother over her body gain priority over the rights of the preborn.

2.1 Debate on Personhood

Much of the debate in regard to abortion has centered on whether the fetus is a person or not. If the fetus is a person, then it has the rights that belong to persons, including the right to life. The concept of personhood, in other words, is the bridge that connects the fetus with the right to life.

Susan Sherwin attempts to define personhood on the basis of interactions of individuals in relation to others, thus suggesting that the preborn is not a person. “Persons . . . are members of a social community that shapes and values them, and personhood must be defined in terms of interactions and relationships with others.”¹⁹ However, this would make the fetus a human non-person. Does such a creature really exist? Who should be in charge of determining which characteristics of personality constitute personhood? In the past, numerous human beings including slaves and women have been defined as non-persons. Should we begin a new list of human beings who aren’t really persons?

The lack of certain personality traits used to define personhood would remove many humans who are currently considered to be persons from the status of personhood. This kind of definition of personhood would make into non-persons those who are in a coma, the elderly with degenerative disorders and those who are mentally deficient. Is it then justified to consider these human beings as non-persons? If one defines personhood on the basis of those who consciously perform personal acts, those who are asleep would be classified as non-persons and could be killed during a nap. If one defines personhood on the basis of those who have a present capacity to perform personal acts, those who are in a coma could be killed at any point during their coma. If one defines personhood on the basis of those who have a history of

performing personal acts, those who have been in a coma from birth would be classified as non-persons and could be killed at any point after birth. If one defines personhood on the basis of those who have a future capacity to perform personal acts, those who are dying would be classified as non-persons and could be killed at any point. Human newborns are among the least capable mammals in their ability to perform physically and mentally. Personhood based upon the ability to perform certain personal functions could be used to define newborns as non-persons, rendering them susceptible to possible infanticide.

Different sides of the abortion debate define the beginning of personhood at different points in development. Abortion proponents claim that a fertilized egg is just a single cell - like any other cell of the human body and is only "potential life". However, this single cell is alive by any biological definition of life and defines the beginning of each new human being. This single cell is unique from both the father's and mother's cells, so it cannot be defined as just part of the woman's body.

Abortion proponents claim that prior to 20 weeks of gestation, the cerebral cortex is not developed enough so that the fetus can possess an individual human personality, and therefore, the fetus is not a person. Defining personhood on the basis of personality results in several problems. It is impossible to know when a fetus goes from non-person to person status. Of course, personality is a function of the body, and is programmed at least partially by the DNA. Trying to distinguish a separate existence of mind from the brain results in a kind of mind/body dualism, that is unacceptable to scientists and untenable for philosophers. Brain development occurs in a continuous progression of virtually indistinguishable events. There is no point at which the brain suddenly becomes functional. In fact, many aspects of brain development occur after birth. Most aspects of the newborn personality do not emerge until weeks to months after birth. Therefore, a definition of personhood on the basis of brain development would allow for infanticide - at least through the first month. Most people will be unwilling to accept such a definition of personhood, since they are able to see exactly what is being killed when the individual is a newborn. What most people don't know is that the fetus looks markedly like a newborn, only smaller, after the first three months of gestation.

Defining personhood on the basis of fetal viability outside the womb also has several problems. By this definition, the age of viability is subject to human technology. In the United Kingdom, this definition led to the lowering of the age of viability from 28 weeks to 24 weeks in 1990. An article published in 2002 in the medical journal *Nature*, indicated that an artificial womb might lower the age of viability. The author of the study commented on the possible implications of such technology on the availability of abortion, since the current legal definition of abortion “rights” is based upon “fetal viability.”²⁰

Defining personhood on the basis of self-consciousness and an interest in one’s own continued existence allows for infanticide. In “Defense of Abortion and Infanticide,” Michael Tooley claims that individuals have a right to life only at the point of self-consciousness and an interest in their own continued existence. Tooley concludes, therefore, that infanticide is morally acceptable. If the individual will, in the future develop such interest, is it permissible to kill the individual before such interests develop? Kristine Kruszelnicki argues that “consciousness and self-awareness, often proposed as fair markers for personhood, merely identify stages in human development. Consciousness doesn’t exist in a vacuum. It exists only as part of the greater whole of a living entity. To say that an entity does not yet have consciousness is to nonetheless speak of that entity within which lies the inherent capacity for consciousness, and without which consciousness could never develop.”²¹ Again Nat Hentoff points out, “It misses a crucial point to say that the extermination can take place because the brain has not yet functioned or because that thing is not yet a ‘person’. Whether the life is cut off in the fourth week or the fourteenth, the victim is one of our species, and has been from the start.”²²

2.2 Philosophers’ Arguments from Women Rights

Proponents of abortion say that a woman should have the right to control her own body. This sounds reasonable. However, the fetus is not actually part of a woman’s body. The fetus is a separate individual, which has its own circulatory system and is composed of a unique DNA sequence compared to the mother. Regarding the

claim that the fetus is part of the mother, Professor Peter Kreeft made the rather comical observation, “But in that case, every pregnant woman has four eyes and four feet, and half of all pregnant women have penises! Clearly, the absurd conclusion came from the false premise that the fetus is only part of the mother.”²³

Some philosophers—beginning with Judith Jarvis Thomson and Jane English—have argued that, even if the fetus is a person, abortion may be morally justified. In other words, they dispute the truth of the premise, “It is wrong to end the life of an innocent person.” Thomson offers an analogy: imagine that you were knocked unconscious, hooked up to a famous violinist who must depend on you for life support for the coming nine months. Thomson maintains that you would be morally justified in unhooking yourself, even if it resulted in the death of the violinist. By analogy, a pregnant woman is justified in “unhooking” herself from the fetus, even if doing so results in the death of the fetus and even if the fetus is a person. Thompson’s “Unplugging the Violinist” (a fictional scenario in which one is kidnapped by friends of a dying violinist in need of a kidney, and forced to remain plugged into him for nine months in order to save his life) illustrates the dilemma of bodily autonomy, while suggesting grounds for abortion in cases of rape.²⁴

Thomson’s analogy has several limitations; it is applied only to cases of rape. The philosopher Jane English amended Thomson’s example. Imagine that you go out at night, knowing that you might be rendered unconscious and hooked up to the violinist. You would still, according to English, be entitled to unhook yourself. This case is more closely analogous to conventional cases of unwanted pregnancies.

Both these philosophers fail to recognize that the relationship between a preborn and her mother is unlike an artificial union of one stranger to another. The fetus is not an intruder. She is in the rightful home of a human being at her age and stage of development. Unlike the kidneys, which exist for the woman’s body, the uterus exists and each month prepares to welcome someone else’s body. A woman has a right to her body, but so too a fetus has a right to the uterus that is her biologically given home.

Furthermore, recognizing the biological responsibilities with which we have evolved as a species, we understand that while one is not always morally obliged to help a stranger, one is duty-bound to provide basic sustenance and protection to one's biological offspring. A breast-feeding mother can't claim 'bodily autonomy' and abandon her infant in the basement while she travels; neither can a pregnant mother abandon her responsibility to a dependent human child. If a wayward child were to find his way onto a stranger's yacht only to be discovered a day later at sea, he would be temporarily dependent on that sailor's resources alone. Would the sailor be justified in tossing the child overboard into shark-infested waters? While the rape victim did not choose and is unfairly put into this position, her basic obligation to her dependent human offspring is no less real than that of the sailor with an unwanted stowaway.

Moreover, is it truly the mark of a civilized people that the more vulnerable and dependent a human is, the more we can justify his or her death? Is "might-makes-right" the best we can do as a modern and sophisticated people faced with a vulnerable being and a woman in crisis? Abortion does not merely "unplug a dying stranger," abortion actively dismembers and kills an otherwise healthy human being who is in an age-appropriate, naturally dependent union with his or her mother. Abortion neither 'unrapes' a woman nor helps her heal.

Abortion proponents claim that every child should be wanted. They also claim that wanted children are less likely to be abused than those who are "unwanted." However, child abuse statistics show that since abortion was legalized in 1973 in the US, child abuse has risen dramatically, although over one million unwanted children are aborted every year.²⁵ Is it likely that the callous attitude fostered by the prevalence of abortion has contributed to the child abuse problem? A study made in 2007 shows that those mothers who have a prior history of abortion, in fact, abuse their children more than those who do not have a history of abortion.²⁶ Moreover, being wanted is not a condition of the child, but of the adult. Is it fair to kill a child because of the attitude of an adult?

3. The Legality/Criminality of Abortion

Human Rights are those rights, which should be available to every individual without any discrimination of any kind. Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom. The most important right of a human is the right to life. It is the supreme human right from which no derogation is permitted. It is inalienable. The Article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibit the arbitrary deprivation of life. There are differences in the legalization or criminalization of abortion among the World Nations. Abortion is illegal in many countries of the South American Continent, many of the Sub-Saharan African countries, most countries in the Middle-East and North Africa, and quite many countries in Asia. Only two countries in Western Europe consider abortion illegal. Most countries that have legalized abortions have given restricted right for abortion namely to save the life of the mother. A few countries, however, have extended the idea of the right of women to make an informed choice to go for abortion. To discuss the nuances of the laws in different countries of the world would be beyond the scope of the paper. We shall only focus on a few developed countries in the West in the first part and then discuss the legal aspects of abortion in India.

3.1 The Legal position in Some Developed Countries of the West

The preamble from the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child UNCRC of 1989 states, “Bearing in mind that, as indicated in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, *before as well as after birth.*” But the actual legal practice in many countries that have signed in UNCRC does not seem to adhere strictly to the spirit of this preamble. Until recently in France, abortion was legal up to 12 weeks of gestation, but only if the woman was judged by her doctor to be in a “state of distress” because of her pregnancy. The new legislation passed in 2004 allows women to get abortions during the first 12 weeks of

pregnancy with no questions asked, lifting previous restriction, namely a woman could only get an abortion if her condition put “her in a situation of distress.” After 12 weeks, an abortion can only be carried out if the continuation of the pregnancy poses a serious risk to the health of the woman, or if there is a strong possibility that the child in the womb will suffer from an incurable disease.

In Germany, the abortion procedure is also legal up to 12 week gestation but with restrictions. The regulations state that abortion is allowed in the first trimester if the woman is declared to be in a state of stress. It is interesting to note that this determination is made only after a mandatory counseling appointment and a compulsory 3 day waiting period. Abortion is also available without counseling to women whose pregnancy has resulted from a sexual crime committed against them. Post 12 weeks gestation, German law allows for abortions only to avert the danger of a grave impairment of the physical or emotional state of health of the pregnant woman.

Both countries demonstrate in law an understanding that abortion should not be something that can be accessed without restriction. They seem to recognize the rights of children in the womb by having laws that protect those rights, but sadly only after 12 weeks of gestation. This goes against the scientific fact that human life begins at the moment of conception. The latter part of the law to permit abortion only in case of serious danger to the life of woman seems morally acceptable as it inculcates the spirit of the moral principle of double effect. The latter part of the law meets the four conditions required by the principle of double effect: (1) the action itself must be either morally good or at least morally neutral; (2) the bad consequences must not be intended; (3) the good consequences cannot be the direct causal result of the bad consequences; and (4) the good consequences must be proportionate to the bad consequences.

The 1973 verdict often referred to as “Roe vs. Wade,” which legalized abortion in the United States is actually built on the claim that there’s no way to say for certain whether or not abortion kills because no one can say for certain when life begins. Justice Harry Blackmun, who authored the majority opinion wrote: “The judiciary, at this point in the development of man’s

knowledge, is not in a position to... resolve the difficult question of when life begins... since those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus.”²⁷ This is clearly contrary to the well established scientific fact that the preborn right from the moment of conception is a human life. Dr. Nathanson had this to say about the ruling: “Our final victory had been propped up on a misreading of obstetrics, gynecology, and embryology, and that’s a dangerous way to win.”²⁸ The 1973 verdict of US Supreme Court, because of the “misreading of obstetrics, gynecology and embryology” goes against the declaration of the Independence of the United States which guarantees “certain unalienable Rights, among those are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The legal arguments against abortion in the United States should be examined from the perspective of the rights afforded to all persons by laws of the Nation. The US Supreme Court, however, invented additional rights that were said to surpass the right to life. Unfortunately hundreds of women in the United States have died from abortion since Roe v. Wade according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and this is likely only a fraction of the actual number in light of the fact that several states have failed to report abortion data for many years.²⁹

3.2 Women Disempowerment through Abortions in India

According to Ministry of Health official statistics, the abortion rate remained unchanged in India between 1996 and 2001 (three per 1,000), even though the absolute number of abortions increased dramatically during that time. Abortion is legal under broad grounds in India, but regulations require that they be performed by registered physicians in certified facilities, and official statistics include only procedures that meet these regulations. Because of the difficulties in meeting all official requirements, a large number of abortions by qualified physicians are not reported. It is also likely that some physicians who are certified to perform abortions do not report or underreport the number of procedures they perform. According to estimates using findings from a facility-based survey conducted in six states, about 2.4 million abortions are performed annually in India by formally trained providers in approved facilities, and the

abortion rate in such approved facilities is 10 per 1,000 women.³⁰ However, the survey also estimated that nearly two-thirds of abortions are not performed at approved facilities, indicating that the overall abortion rate is about three times more than the reported abortion rate.

In India, the situation was quite different. There was hardly a fight when the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act legalized abortion in 1971. The law passed quietly, without any significant opposition. The Act was quite an unprecedented piece of legislation, stipulating that abortions (up to twenty weeks of gestation) could be performed by registered medical practitioners. To a close observer, this should not come as a surprise. In the political climate of that time, concern for women's reproductive health was not a major factor in the passage of this law. In fact, it was expedited largely due to pressure from the population lobby. Notwithstanding the few people involved in the drafting process who were genuinely concerned with improving conditions for women, the main impetus behind the Act was the belief that legalizing abortion would help curb the population growth rate. Curbing the population growth seemed to be a necessity based on a faulty assumption that population is a liability rather than human resource.³¹

In the Indian context, legalization of abortion as a positive right granted to women as part of their empowerment is callous. In fact it disempowers women due to many additional problems among which the first is the wrongful interpretation and implementation of this legislation. Even though the Act's criteria outlining eligibility were fairly liberal, the documents used to process requests for abortion were worded in such a way as to disempower women. Medical professionals, instead of women themselves, became the primary gatekeepers of abortion. Lack of accountability kept the power in the hands of doctors with many of them interpreting the conditions of the Act in their own idiosyncratic ways. No systems were in place to follow up on what doctors were saying or doing.

Many of the so-called benefits of abortion are based upon a distortion of the 'facts' and exaggerated claims of hardship incurred by a lack of the availability of legalized abortion. Proponents of legalized abortion claim that the criminalization of

abortion would result in the deaths of thousands of woman yearly as they will be forced to perform unsafe back alley abortions. It has now been almost 44 years since the passage of the MTP Act. Only a token number of abortions – a very tiny proportion of India's millions of abortions that have been performed since then – were carried out safely in accordance with the Act's provisions. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that out of the estimated 5.3 million induced abortions in India in 1989, 4.7 million were unsafe leading to the needless injury and death of many women. The experience of other countries shows that restricting abortion does not cause a rise in maternal deaths. Despite its tight abortion restrictions, Ireland has the lowest maternal mortality rate in the world, according to a study by several agencies at the United Nations.³² Malta also has substantial abortion limitations and yet has among the lowest maternal death rate world-wide, lower than the United States.³³ Data compiled by Polish government agencies shows a marked decrease in maternal deaths once abortion was made illegal.³⁴

Another major concern in India is that abortion coupled with techniques for determining whether the fetus is male or female could be used for sex selection, which would probably result in fewer female babies, depriving the right of girl child to be born. Despite the ban on pre-natal sex tests and gender-based abortions in India, both have seen a steady rise in the country since ultrasound technology was first introduced in the 1960s. It is estimated that nearly half a million girls are aborted every year. In his recent ebook, *India Dishonoured: Behind a Nation's War on Women* British blogger Sunny Hundal argues that there are '60 million missing women' in India, leaving the country's demography so skewed that males outnumber females by 37 million (a figure, he notes, bigger than the total male population of the UK). India is not just a country in which women are afforded inferior status, he argues: it is one engaged in outright 'gendercide' or more precisely 'femicide' on its female population through sex-selective abortion, infanticide and dowry deaths.³⁵

To Western eyes, the term 'family planning' may have connotations of furthering women's choices over the make-up of

their families; in India, the imposition of such policies actually reduces choice. The case of India's shortfall in women was first highlighted by economist Amartya Sen in his 1990 essay for the *New York Review of Books*, where he claimed that over 100 million women were 'missing' as a result of gender bias across the developing world. Citing India and China as prime culprits, Sen explained the startling figure by invoking 'neglect' of Third World women in healthcare, nutrition and education. The existence of social problems for women is not justification for another, even worse, evil. The social problems should be fixed, instead of killing the preborn.

Conclusion

The better one understands what is at stake in abortion, the more one realizes it is anti-human, anti-life, and anti-woman. Abortion-rights movements are desperate to protect the image of abortion as positive and pro-woman. Ironically, their biggest threat is from those they claim to champion: women. Abortion-rights proponents are devastated by the women of the Silent No More Awareness Campaign, for example, who stand with their placards "I regret my abortion"¹ and by the powerful of Feminists for Life make the compelling argument that "women deserve better than abortion."³⁷

We need to destroy the old "baby vs. woman" dichotomy which dominated the abortion debate for decades as though women and children are not natural enemies. It was a pseudo-feminism which brought about such a dichotomy in the first place. Abortion is not an act of empowerment but the result of abandonment, betrayal, and desperation, and it negatively affects women's lives. The website www.afterabortion.com established by a woman who had 5 abortions provides a place for women to help each other cope with the aftermath of their abortions. There are nearly 2.5 million posts. They tell stories of how they were coerced into aborting their children by boyfriends, husbands, friends, and family. They describe how abortion was far from being a choice. They speak of overwhelming guilt, nightmares, excessive drinking, drug abuse, promiscuity, inability to form or maintain relationships, difficulty bonding with later children, and other

ways in which they are suffering. No compassionate person wants a woman to suffer through the personal tragedy of abortion, whether legal or illegal. As Feminists for Life says, “women deserve better than abortion” and if I may add “the preborn babies deserve to be born.”

Notes

1. Though the term abortion can mean miscarriages and induced termination of pregnancy, in the essay we employ this term only in the latter sense.
2. Ronan O’Rahilly, and F. Müller, *Human Embryology & Teratology* (New York: Wiley-Liss, 1996), 5-55.
3. Keith L. Moore, *Before We Are Born: Essentials of Embryology*, 7th ed. (Philadelphia: Saunders, 2008), 2.
4. see Marjorie A. England, “What is an Embryo?” in *Life Before Birth*, ed. Marjorie A. England (London: Mosby-Wolfe, 1996).
5. Keith L. Moore, T.V.N. Persaud and Mark G. Torchia, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 9th ed. (Philadelphia: Saunders, 2011), 13.
6. Ibid., 77, 350.
7. *The American Heritage Medical Dictionary*, reprint edition (May 7, 2008), s.v. “Life.”
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