

Abortion: An Objective Discussion

Dr. Jerry Galloway

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Abortion or Right-to-Life

Commonly, two opposing sides argue their views even to the point of terrible violence like to sides engaged in a great contest. Politicians violate even the most basic standards of decency and honesty to protect their advantage in the contest. But, neither side even remotely captures anything meaningful or even accurate in their respective philosophies. They hurl their arguments at each other hoping to attract the undecided and somehow increase their numbers and strengthen army of fighters on their behalf. It is a dysfunctional argument, a failed mission and a disgraceful drama that achieves nothing.

PRO

One side, being FOR or PRO - Abortion, willingly characterize their mission in a number of ways that are all highly questionable and literally false. This includes the phrase, "A Woman's Right To Choose" as well as "Don't Tell the Woman What To Do With HER Body" with an obvious emphasis on it being her own body. These phrases are not so much meant to constitute an argument as much as they are intended to persuade. That is, each phrase is intended to appear as an axiom or truism readily accepted by anyone. In other words, they are "political" statements and not at all intellectual. The phrases that actually attempt an argument are the equating of a right to abortion as simple health care. That is, any questioning of a full and unrestricted right to abortion is equated as a literal attack on women's health care.

Most of this political battle goes to naught in that these phrases seem to convert no one. Literally nothing about this profile, willingly offered by those who subscribe to this PRO-abortion side, are even remotely accurate, intellectual or even honest. This is one of the most frustrating elements of this side of the debate.

The official position(s) of this side of the debate support abortion on demand - meaning that a woman can simply make the selection of having an abortion at will without being subject to questioning or rules. There are fringes that could be considered outliers in the supporting debate that go beyond mere choice and life decision to full-blown celebration of abortion as a kind of victory or worthy achievement of honor and merit. We can set this aside and consider this as rare or even eccentric. The official positions of the political leaders of the PRO-abortion side of the debate, including presidential candidates, can hardly be viewed as rare or fringe. They are, almost by definition, foundational and mainstream among those on that side of the issue.

At this writing, this officially endorsed and sanctioned position calls for the unrestricted freedom to have an abortion at any time up to the actual moment of birth all at tax-payer expense. To make this clear, a baby in the womb can be killed, cut-away and aborted even while in labor. At least one high ranking government politician officially supported the killing of

a baby after a successful live-birth if the preferences of the mother in consultation with the doctor were to make that choice. How this would not be considered murder is not clear to me and seems obviously wrong. To show the irrationality of those on this side of the debate, the resulting criticism of that perspective, that value system, enraged those who support abortion rights and bolstered their defensive posture. To further illustrate the irrationality of this side of the issue, it is now a common claim that abortion is a constitutional right. Of course, there is no such right in the constitution and not one constitutional scholar would agree. It is just another absurdity in the quest for power for which an honest intellectual would be embarrassed.

CON

So, I have not yet addressed much about the merits of this side of the issue except to declare the mantra of PRO-abortion to be seriously flawed and misguided. Similar criticism can be applied to the philosophy of those against abortion. Theirs is most commonly called "Pro-Life" and is meant to label all abortion as bad and unacceptable. One common justification or rationalization for this position is the notion that killing human life is against God. This naturally brings in everything from church doctrine to the 10 Commandments. I would be inclined to label this religious posture as a fringe within the Pro-Life movement except that I believe it to be much more wide-spread and common than that. My reservation about it is simply that it tends to simply cite a rule, a divine mandate to be blindly followed and, in that way, avoids a moral, ethical and social analysis of the merits in the issue.

A Denver talk radio station recently conducted a session for callers to offer bumper-sticker or billboard-style slogans that might be persuasive to the undecided. I'm not even sure there are any undecided in today's America. It seems everyone is already on one side or the other and that too inhibits open discussion of the merits. Everyone seems to just parrot the slogans of their side of the issue. I have come to disrespect both sides of the debate as mindless and uncaring bullies just out to win their political battle in some sort of struggle for power.

Failed Considerations

I'll start with some personal perspective here. I would recognize and respect a philosophical and moral challenge to my ideas and I fashion these ideas with that in mind. I believe my notions here stand up well against such challenges.

The first, as mentioned earlier, abortion is not a constitutional right. The Constitution does not say anything at all about it. The current status of past Supreme Court rulings establishes a limited entitlement. The case of Roe v. Wade was a feeble and incorrect extension of yet a different constitutional entitlement: a right to privacy. Some even question that entitlement. But, even if we assume a right to the pursuit of happiness is dependent on some protection of personal privacy, there's no constitutional basis for extending that to a freedom of abortion. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court has decided in that direction and, thus, a constitutional principle was established.

Why is a drunk driver responsible for the damage caused in a crash? I mean, after all, the drunk driver no longer has any control, no free-will - so on what basis are they still held responsible? The act of drinking to excess itself constitutes a willful acceptance of the consequences and the responsibility that goes with it. Likewise, a willful act of sexual relations constitutes an acceptance of the natural consequences of reproduction and the responsibility that goes with it. The analogy works very well and there is a lot of merit in this argument.

A woman, once pregnant, is no longer alone. It is no longer just her body but includes another. An embryo at any stage of its development is fully developed for the stage that it is in at the time. Interestingly, this is also true for 6 mo. old babies compared to 5 year old children. They look different. They are in a limited stage of development compared with adult counterparts, yet still fully developed for the stage they are in at that point. Even 40 year olds appear and function quite differently from their septuagenarian alternatives, although both are all they are supposed to be for that stage of development. This is no less true for the various prebirth stages of an embryo.

But, to point out that an embryo even at the zygote stage (initial fertilized cells) is in fact human or even a human being, per se, might satisfy some religious argument but not for me. In fact, I do agree it is a human being but still does not settle the issue for me. Humans are killed, willingly, all the time. It doesn't even matter to me, particularly, that it is an innocent human being or that it presumably has future potential. A severed finger might be said to be fully formed and human yet it might reasonably be discarded or destroyed. There are comparisons to be made with those in comas, those terminally ill, capital punishment, and more, all of which provide useful comparisons for better understanding the value system involved. In other words, recognition of status as human is not the end of the issue.

But, of course, an embryo is not a severed finger or inanimate cells like hair; it is a fully formed being. Even if one argues that this being, this human being is not yet a baby as such, it will become one in due course. At some point, it is a baby. Do not be fooled by political distinctions, created to affect power rather than recognize genuine and relevant characteristics. For example, the notion that a baby becomes a baby only at the moment of birth because it separates from the mother is a political distinction. Babies even after birth are often dependent on and connected to an incubator to provide controlled and artificial environmental conditions. They do not cease to be a baby. With a little consideration it becomes clear that dependency on a support system or even the geography of a baby's location are incidental to its status as a baby. I.e., It is still a baby regardless of such things.

This quest to define personhood or what it means to actually be a person is an old challenge but I would argue two things. One, a zygote, regardless of being human, regardless of being fully formed for its point of growth, is not yet a baby. I suggest that it is not yet a person. A number of variables come in to play here. For example, there is not yet a heartbeat, no brain, no brain waves, no nervous system. And, while it is fair to point out that such things are as yet premature, I still maintain that some minimal set of characteristics is necessary to constitute a baby, per se.

On the other hand, by the time it is nearing its time of birth it is clearly and unequivocally a baby. The extreme position of some democrats that it is acceptable to abort a baby at the time of or even near the time of birth is clearly homicide. Of that there is no question. The question is at what point it makes its transition from mere fertilized cells to become a baby. No matter what guide is proposed it is open to reasonable challenge (not the challenges of political bias). Nevertheless, I will propose a guide and offer a reasonable defense for it.

Woman's Right to Choose

So, these notions apply very directly to the claims of the pro-abortion movement. The claim that it is a woman's right to choose ignores two very fundamental issues: 1. by becoming pregnant or engaging in that behavior, she has forfeited her right to ignore the consequences of that (the drunk driver argument), and 2. she is no longer alone and thus cannot make decisions as a single entity. Pregnancy does change a woman from being a singular entity into a hybrid, a composite, an amalgam - she is a host and does not and cannot ignore or make choices without considering the existence of the other human entity. The failure of the pro-abortion argument to address this makes their claim illegitimate and purely political.

A Woman's Control of Her Own Body

This claim fails in the same way on both points. To the extent that the human entity is a baby, an actual person, it has rights. Whether these are constitutional rights, rights of legal standing or other rights might all be worthy of debate. But, like no human being can be ignored in their right to exist, the same must be considered for the baby. The notion that a woman is controlling her own body is a political argument that specifically ignores this. As such, it cannot be legitimate and is instead a political statement in the quest for power.

Attacking Health Care

The other argument of the pro-abortion argument that I will address is the claim that, not only are women entitled to abortion "on demand," but that it must be free. In other words, the government is obligated to provide and pay for this service. This gets to the really big issues of what government is supposed to be and the distinctions in ideology between the Left and the Right. The pro-abortion side clearly see government as the provider. But (without taking on the whole political debate), the government is not a benevolent unending resource in the sky from which we can make endless withdrawals. That is, government is not "free." Nothing is free. Someone must pay. In this case it would be the tax-payer. Of course, not all tax-payers want to fund abortion with their tax dollars.

The left's common argument that democracy dictates that majority rules would make smaller groups subject to the tyranny of the masses. I would suggest that this is such a controversial issue for many, using their tax dollars to fund this practice might be such a violation of their collective conscience that other means and other resources should be better considered. Nevertheless, the issues for the role of government remain.

There is another element of extremism here that cannot be ignored. Since there are numerous affordable options still available for abortions, removing government as a resource is hardly an attack. If it were an attack on anything, it would be an attack on tax-payer-funded abortion. To

conflate abortion to the level of general health care is ridiculous. So, there is literally nothing about this argument that is the least bit honest.

Pro-Life

Leaving the religious arguments aside, it is reasonable to want to preserve the lives of human beings of all ages, whether 70 or minus 3 months. Persons both young and old deserve the protection of society of their well-being and their rights - certainly their right to exist. The problem with the so-called pro-life position is usually that any fertilized human egg is considered already a complete person and this might be considered by many to be an extreme view. Another attribute is its innocence. I.e., this is an innocent life and that is a foundational principle which demands protection from the very first moment of existence. Not only does this position maintain that it is human but also that it is a person - a baby - and with all rights that pertain to that status.

I believe there are certain obvious aspects of this easily established with no debate. For example, whatever it is, it is at least human. It isn't the biology of some other creature; it is human. Too, it is a living thing. It is alive and evolving. It is not a mere random array of cells and chemicals. Those cells and chemicals are a process and an entity well-underway - a living thing. It is life and it is human. This seems axiomatic and any challenge or opposition seems pointless on its face.

I will go a step further to suggest another point that seems equally obvious. It is a completely formed and fully established being for that particular stage or point of its development. Consider that a 3 year old does not at all resemble a fully formed adult. They are visually different in virtually every way and easily distinguishable. Yet, the 3 year old is a fully formed being for that age. The 3 year old will evolve to that shape and form of an 18 year old, and later a 40 year old, and ultimately, a very old, wrinkled and gray octogenarian. This is true for all humans of all ages including the extremely old.

The growth and lifespan of a human being moves through many stages and many forms yet, in each case, at each point, the human entity is a fully formed person for its stage or age at that moment. So, a newly conceived human consisting of a half-dozen cells is all that it is supposed to be for that level of development. Should a 2 year old little boy be considered expendable, something less than human, simply because it is not a fully formed adult person? Of course not and nor should a baby - or even a baby that has not yet left the womb. That is, an embryo, both at 1 week and at 8 months, is in fact a fully formed human being.

So, for a prolife advocate this perspective seems complete and self-evident and leads to only one conclusion: the life must be protected at all costs and this imperative cannot be compromised for any reason. For me this is not so clear. While I would admit it is a human being, that alone does not finalize the issue.

Humans die and are killed every day. Opposing soldiers are killed in the name of national defense and safety. Criminals are killed in the name of justice and law enforcement. The injured and severely damaged are sometimes terminated (killed) when medical efforts fail and

hope is lost. The old and infirm are sometimes terminated when their function is so deteriorated and quality of life has reached some extreme and unacceptable point. I.e., a life being a human life does not in itself guarantee or even warrant any sort of absolute support and sustenance. Still, it is fair to say, that to override a default right to life - an inherent priority of a right to exist and live - there must be good cause... a superior priority in the conflict.

The mistake of the prolife side is not in their notion of what constitutes humanity nor in their perception of innocence and the rights that go with "personhood." Granted, the reasoning errors on the other side (call it, pro-abortion, women's right to choose, - or whatever) are more grievous and weak than for the prolife. The prolife failure, predictably, lies in its extremity: the notion that the right to life is absolute and uncompromising. Nothing is absolute and immune to compromise, life included.

A Solution to the Conflict

There can be no solution in reason or in law, no bringing together the opposing factions, so long as the two sides persist in their extremities and absurdities. The so-called pro-abortion group must recognize that there are two lives involved and an innocent human life demands both recognition and reasonable protections even, if need be, against a mother intent on its destruction. The prolife group must understand that there can be reasonable exceptions to maintaining a pregnancy. And, a purely religious argument is moot in that it will only be meaningful to those who already believe similarly and wasted on those who do not. Only with both sides evolving to such a more reasonable position can any genuine conversation be had or progress made.

What is a Baby?

I would suggest one last consideration. An elderly or injured person has received medical assistance and resides in the intensive care unit. All medical intervention has been exhausted and the prognosis is grim. The family is consulting with the attending physician to make final decisions. The patient is maintaining a heart beat but no longer shows any sort of brainwaves. They are brain-dead.

It may be tough to determine a definitive definition of death especially when considering things like hair and nails continuing to grow even long after a heart has stopped. But, it can be equally difficult to distinguish between the early stages of human cells versus when that growth becomes what one might call a baby.

The patient in the hospital is connected to the machine that keeps the heart beating indefinitely and one relative is hopeful that the patient's heart will one day beat on its own unassisted. But, of course, the brain is reportedly still dead. The other relatives, realizing the hopelessness of this case, agree with the doctor to "pull the plug." This naturally means to end the support system on which the beating heart depends and thereby terminate the life of the patient. However, some may see that life already finished considering they were brain-dead. The lack of brain activity is, itself, a pretty definition state of death, heart beat or not.

Of course, one never really sees this condition reversed. That is, one does not find a fully functioning brain but with a completely dead heart. No one in the hospital is checking the medical journals and discussing strategies with their doctor while their heart has completely stopped. In fact, it might be said that both a beating heart and a functioning brain (even if in a coma or while asleep, etc.) are assumed and even necessary elements of life.

I can see that it would be a reasonable perspective that a new human embryo is not yet an actual baby until the presence of a heartbeat and brain activity. Certainly, a human embryo that produces both a heartbeat and brain activity is an actual human baby and must be respected as such. With no heartbeat and with no brain activity, I can accept that it is not, as yet, an actual baby and enjoys the mere potential of that as a future, but as yet unachieved, condition. I.e., it is not yet a baby but would presumably become one.

None of this has anything to do with the seriousness of an abortion decision which naturally must be considered killing. But, it seems reasonable that an abortion of a new embryo with no heartbeat or brain activity can be considered a different thing than killing it after such conditions develop. If a line is to be drawn in compromise between the two factions in this issue, perhaps a line can best be drawn upon that condition of both heartbeat and brain activity.

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