

## **The Pro-Choice Position and the question of "When Does Life Begin?"**

### An Argument for Caution

Abstract: "When does Life begin?" To the pro-choicers, this is a critical question. Because they don't want to kill a life. But most of my pro-choice friends tell me that "they don't know and moreover nobody knows when life begins." And thus they go on to say that they believe that each woman therefore must have her own free choice to let her own conscience decide if the "growth" inside her is not human or human, and thus based on that choice, decide if she should or should not have an abortion. This essay attempts to address that situation. The premise being that the very fact that we do not know when life begins or whether the "growth" is a life indicates that we should be against destroying it and exercise caution.

I've never run into a murderous Pro-Choice person. I'm sure there are a few wacko's out there, but most of the pro-choice folks I run into are kind compassionate people. Many of them are good friends, friends that would probably risk their lives to save me from harm. It is on the basis of this knowledge and friendships that I write this brief discussion on life.

I also can't say that I have ever run into any Pro-Choicer who would want to kill a child. All the pro-choicers I know, are horrified when they hear of a manic parent killing their children. They are also horrified when they hear of people killing other people. So when I discuss "choice" with them, it becomes very obvious to me that most of them would have a lot of trouble with abortion if there was a definite way to prove that the "fetus" is human and/or a baby.

Now on the "Pro-life" (or anti-choice if you wish) side, one can argue that, it is for the sake of convenience that most people define the unborn baby as a fetus, it eases their conscience, it allows them to ignore the horror of what they are condoning and so on. This is true in some cases. In other cases though I believe it is because they are not fully sure of the fact that a fetus is not a child and thus would hate to impose "their" morals on another person. Now at this time perhaps we can make a perfunctory difference between the "pro-abortion" folks and the "pro-choice" folks. This may be just an imaginary difference but it really has come up numerous times in my discussions with "pro-choicers." The argument usually is presented to me like this: "I

would personally never ever dream of having, or performing, or recommending someone else to have an abortion, but I'd argue for their free "choice" in the matter. For after all I would never want to impose my moral values on them." This therefore is the pro-choice argument. At least that would be the true logical name for it, for they believe that everyone should be able to make their own choice.

And thus for the purpose of this discussion, I'll assume there is a difference between the "pro-abortion" people and the "pro-choice" people. A pro-abortion person would have an abortion. A pro-choice person wouldn't have one, but wouldn't stop you from having one.

Now let's go back to a point I made earlier. In my discussions, one of the first questions I ask when I am discussing abortion is: When does life begin?

To the pro-choicers, this as I've said is a critical question. Because they don't want to kill a life. But most of my pro-choice friends tell me that "they don't know and moreover nobody knows when life begins. And thus they go on to say that they believe that each woman therefore must have her own free choice to let her own conscience decide if the "growth" inside her is not human or human, and therefore based on that choice, decide if she should or should not have an abortion.

Now let us begin.

It is my intention in this essay to attempt to prove why "not knowing if the fetus is human" is the exact reason why we should prevent people from having abortions.

If I may restate: The argument is that, each woman must let her own conscience dictate if it what she is carrying is life, and she must be allowed to decide if that perceived life is worth her pain (in childbirth and pregnancy and then caring for it). If it isn't worth her pain and if she does not perceive it as life then she should be allowed to remove/kill it.

If this is the argument, then by the same reasoning why was Susan Smith wrong in eliminating the two pesky children that were holding her down. And thus when she realized that they were inconvenient and a burden, she decided that they were not human and thus had a "post-natal abortion." She killed them. If she was convinced that they were not human, was she right to do what she did?

Why can't the mother of a pesky two year old make the same decision as a mother of a burdensome three month fetus? Is it because we know that a two year old is human? So then can we focus on the fact that the only reason that we gave Jane Roe the choice and legal right to kill her fetus and not Susan Smith, is that WE knew that Susan's post natal fetuses were human, and we are just not sure if Jane Roe's fetus was human?

So the real question of this essay becomes: "does ignorance of the truth or facts become a moral license to kill or allow someone else to kill?" In other words, "does not being sure that a fetus is human, allow you to wash your hands of the decision and allow others to kill that fetus based on their own feelings?"

Let's re-postulate the question and the scenario so that it is familiar yet similar.

The Deer Hunter

If I am hunting and I see a flash in the undergrowth. It could be a deer, but it could also be a person. I don't know, you don't know. Should I shoot at it? Am I morally correct in letting my conscience decide? If I let my conscience decide and I shoot a person, even if no one ever finds out, even if I never find out (let's say I leave without checking) - was it morally right of me to do that? You see ignorance of the truth does not make the moral decision an arbitrary one. Either it is wrong to shoot, or it is right to shoot, or it is amoral (i.e. that is an action that is neutral e.g. shooting at a target). There is an absolute reference and there is an absolute reality, my ignorance of the reference does not absolve me of the wrong-ness of it.

Coming back to the question. The point is that - not knowing if the fetus is human, is not a valid enough reason to say that aborting it, is an amoral act. Nor does not knowing if the fetus is

human a valid reason to allow that decision to be left to the judgment of each individual. My very ignorance of the humanity of the "victim" should be sufficient reason to NOT shoot. Let me rephrase - the very fact that there is a slim possibility that the flash in the undergrowth is human is sufficient reason for me not to shoot at it. In fact it is a great reason for me to stop you from shooting at it too. I would not sit back idly and let your conscience dictate whether you should shoot at it or not. To tie it to our discussion, not knowing that the fetus is human is a very valid reason for NOT allowing anyone to abort it.

### The Lazy Box Tosser

Let me present another scenario. I'm on the 3rd floor of a building and I have a very heavy wooden box that I need to get rid off. If I toss it out the window I can save energy and my back and throw it in the trash after I walk downstairs unburdened. Should I toss the box out the window without checking if I will hit someone or not? I have no knowledge if I will kill someone or injure someone.

See the point, just because I don't know that there is anyone below me doesn't make my act moral. In fact if anything it is all the more reason to make the act immoral. It is wrong to do that. Plain wrong. The only way it would be right, is if I could get a 100% guarantee that there is no one below and no one will walk below until the box has come to a complete stop.

Do you see the fallacy of the "pro-choice because of ignorance" argument? The only morality would be if you knew 100% that the fetus was not human. And in this regard the pro-abortion people have a much more logical statement. Their statement is either a) The fetus is NOT human until the instant it exits it's mother's womb or b) An unsaid but sometimes true statement- I don't care if the fetus is human or not, I choose to kill it anyway.

But the pro-choice argument is fallacious at best and criminally negligent at worst.

But further more, in the above box throwing case, you could not stand back and say "Oh that's up to your conscience to choose to do that" because if someone does that and you stood by while he did it, and you knew that he could kill someone and he does, and you didn't stop him,

you would be wrong! You see in this case you not only must impose your moral values on the other person but if you didn't you'd be just as wrong as he.

Moreover, it should never matter if you ever found out if he had killed someone or not. Your not finding out the answer may allow you to sleep better at night, but it would not make the situation amoral.

Logically if you don't know when life begins, then you should be insistent that no one perform an abortion. Because you have no idea who may be walking under that window.

### The Earthquake Victim

I'd like to add one more example. In the above scenarios, it is possible for the pro-choice friends to argue that in both cases, the agent (i.e. the person making the decision to shoot or throw) is independent of the potential victim. That is, the existence of the victim does not jeopardize or infringe on the agent's rights. First of all this is not the argument, since the original argument is that the pro-choicer is basing the morality of the decision on the ignorance of the humanity of the fetus. But since this response is common let us deal with it with this example.

You are a carpenter, and we've just had an earthquake. The building you were in caved in on both you and an unknown man (that is, someone you have never met). The man is unconscious and his legs are buried under a pile of rubble. Unfortunately in his position he is also blocking your only way out to freedom. You are trapped with very little crawl space. You are in no danger of dying because there are people outside and you can attract their attention. The man on the other hand has perhaps only a 10% chance of surviving if they can free his legs and get him out. But while you are safe, you are trapped. You are a carpenter and amongst your tools right next to you, is a Sawsall battery powered saw, high torque and fully charged, it can cut through anything. If the man makes it out alive he will probably be mentally retarded or paralyzed. You have your saw. It may take days for them to move the man. Days where you will be stuck there, no food, but maybe they can pass you water in a tube. You have a fully powered saw. The man's legs are stuck. A man who may be a total vegetable. The medics can't reach, either him or you to do anything until everything else is cleared, and that may be days, painful days. You are trapped, the man is unconscious, maybe in a coma, maybe never to come out of it, and you

have a saw. There are only 2 legs between you and freedom and they are not your legs. And you have a saw.

Your comfort, freedom and convenience are hampered by this man you do not know. By this man who may not even be able to function like a normal human anymore. By this man who may die anyway. It's a powerful saw, it can cut through steel plates.

Is having the saw too uncomfortable, then give the saw to someone on the other side. He has the saw and can free you at the cost of the life of the maybe alive/maybe dead man. Do you ask him to cut you out? Does he cut? Would it be moral? He would be killing someone you don't know, but yet someone who impacts you greatly. Does he cut? Is it your choice? Do you have the right to make that choice? Do you cut? And am I justified in standing passively by, while you cut through the stranger's legs and while he bleeds to death, you pull his torn up body past you and make your way to freedom. Do you cut?

You have the vacuum tool or the curettage tool or the brain piercing syringe. Do you abort?

Written in 1994 after an argument with Vinay B. at NUKO. See an updated version of this in the How to Argue against Abortion without using the Bible.

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