

# Abortion: tip of iceberg in sea of ethical, legal questions

By Robert D. Inglis

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. — Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776.*

A battle is being waged for the heart and soul of a fundamental premise on which this nation was founded. Is life itself really an inalienable right which government, as its first and highest priority, should protect or is it protectable only if the life is a "wanted" or "useful" life? Although the question presented has far-reaching implications for the elderly, the infirm, the retarded and even the homeless, the debate has most recently centered on the unborn.

For years the American people have had their heads in the sand as to abortion. We have lifted an ear out occasionally to hear the pro-life people arguing "it's a life" only to be countered by the pro-choice camp's argument that "it's just a mass of tissue." But, lately, there has been a concession in the debate that surely should catch our ear: with commendable honesty, many pro-choicers are admitting it's a life.

Unfortunately, taking our heads out of the sand with that admission in the air carries an incredible price. Many of us have had abortions. We have counseled friends or required girlfriends to get abortions. We have taken collections to pay for college roommates' girlfriends' abortions. Painfully, it's dawning on us that if we're wrong on this one, we're real wrong. We're 24,000,000 dead babies wrong (the number of abortions since Roe v. Wade was decided in 1973).

It's also dawning on us that we've been deceived. Individually, we haven't known that by the time we've aborted them, our unborn children have had heartbeats (21 days after conception) and detectable brain waves (42 days after conception). If we had known these things and other prenatal development facts, many of us would not have had abortions.

Collectively, we are now beginning to understand that contrary to the hype, most abortions are not performed because of rape, incest and protection of the life of the mother. In fact, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the research arm of Planned Parenthood (one of the largest abortion providers in the country), only 1 percent of abortions occur for these reasons.

Contrary to the pro-choice rhetoric, we're also

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discovering that abortion is not reserved as a quick fix to teen-age pregnancy. In fact, 75 percent of the abortions done in South Carolina are done on women age 20 and older.

Beyond the pain and the deception, we are beginning to realize that a dangerous ethic is loose in the land. Shockingly for a nation that fought World War II, people are actually wondering out loud whether we are to afford legal protection to all of the living or only to those who are wanted. When unmasked, the phrase "every child, a wanted child" more broadly means "every life, a wanted life."

While such a concept is certainly one on which a society could be based, we must understand it is a radical departure from the concept expressed in the founding text quoted above.

Rather than affirming the dignity of human life as reflected in the preamble to the Declaration of Independence, this utilitarian philosophy depreciates the value of humanity and places us all in a race to prove our value to society.

Under such a system, our intrinsic value or worth is not "self-evident," it must be proved. We must make the mark. If we fail under such a system, our legal personhood evaporates and with it our right to protection under law.

If shown for what it is, I believe that the American people will reject this pro-abortion, utilitarian ethic. We've shed our blood for the principle that human beings are intrinsically valuable and that they are entitled to legal protection and freedom.

Yet, we are blinded by another philosophy which we have come to hold very dear: we worship convenience and refuse to be accountable for our actions. We want our coffee in convenient styrofoam cups, but pause only for platitudes about the destruction of our environment. We want everything instantly and conveniently, but refuse to weigh the external costs of that convenience.

In our minds, our rejection of the utilitarian ethic and our affirmation of the concept of the intrinsic value of human life finds its manifestation in the statement, "I'm personally opposed to abortion." (To speak otherwise would make us "pro-abortion," something reserved for certain shrill voices in our midst.)

In our hearts and in our actions, our devotion to the convenience ethic leads us to what is presumed to be a politically palatable companion statement, "But I support a right of choice in this area." (We call that "pro-choice." It sounds nice.)

Are we so far gone that we would choose the convenience ethic over the fundamental concept that human life is intrinsically valuable?

Is life in our technological age depreciated to the point that we can coldly admit that the child within is a life, but terminate that life because it simply is not convenient to make alternative arrangements, or, equally frightening, because the child within is not "perfect"?

Do we intend to reform the words of the Declaration so as to remove the word "inalienable" and add the words "provided, however, that the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness rights of another are consistent with the convenience of those who hold power over them"?

If we think clearly, I believe that we will answer all of these questions in the negative. Unfortunately, clear thinking on the abortion issue is a rare commodity. Consider three of the most common pro-choice statements.

**Pro-Choice Statement No. 1:** The potential life of the unborn child is surely different from living, breathing people. The unborn child is utterly dependent on its host.

Granted. Equally dependent is a severely affected Downs Syndrome child who is out of the womb and the badly senile elderly person who sits and drools in the hallway of a nursing home awaiting her next forced feeding.

Only two distinctions are possible between these "living, breathing persons" and the unborn child.

The first is place of residence. Surely, our rule of law is not so capricious as to discriminate on the basis of residence. Second, unlike the Downs Syndrome child and the elderly woman that I can put away from me, it must be admitted that the child within is, at least until viability, dependent on a particular person's care.

**Pro-Choice Statement No. 2:** The children that are being aborted are unwanted children. If they were born, they would be abused or be exposed to poverty and horrible circumstances.

When scrutinized, this statement is a full-fledged adoption of the utilitarian ethic. If we admit that the unborn child is alive, death seems a rather harsh solution to the social problem of child abuse and poverty.

Applying the utilitarian ethic to the problem of the homeless, one could make the chillingly reasonable argument that we should "terminate", say, a third of the homeless population. After all, the homeless do not produce anything, they are indeed unwanted and are, in fact, a drain on our economy. Even so, surely we wouldn't propose that the Day Center for the Homeless, that place of hope and comfort for a desperately needy person, lace every third cup of coffee with cyanide.

**Pro-Choice Statement No. 3:** No matter what you say, and no matter whether it's a life or not, you don't have the right to imprison me in my own body for nine months. Even if the fetus is alive, it is dependent on me, and I can remove it if I want to. I have the right to control my body.

There is no easy answer to this pro-choice statement. It is an unashamed endorsement of the convenience ethic which distills the controversy to its core.

Given that 99 percent of all abortions (or 93 percent if you expand "life of the mother" to the loosely defined "health of the mother") are done for birth control, I would pose this question: Am I accountable for my actions, or may I ever escape the consequences of my choices? When my irresponsible sexual activity yields its natural and probable result, is my convenience, my self-interest, my career, my social standing, paramount to the life interest of another, innocent party?

A fundamental principle of our rule of law should inform the first half of our response to this situation: My liberty ends where I affect the life of another. The second half of our response should be informed by the deep compassion of the American people: We must be prepared to reach out with life-giving alternatives to those in crisis pregnancies.