Arguing Abortion: Pick your Battlefield [1]

Submitted by Wessel on Tuesday, 12 April 2016 - 08:42



Read time: 6 minutes
Being a contentious topic, talking about abortion can be difficult. There are two general sides: "pro-life" and "pro-choice". These two often approach the topic from fundamentally different perspectives. This can make it difficult to have a meaningful and persuasive discussion. Instead, emotions get charged which can make the discussion even more difficult.

In this article I intend to describe one way in which to keep the discussion focussed and, hopefully, fruitful.

Justifications for Abortions

There are different "levels" at which the case for abortion can be made. The first two are "special cases". The first is pregnancies resulting from rape. The second is babies diagnosed with some undesirable condition, such as Down Syndrome or Spina Bifida. The last "level" is the "general case", in which it is argued that abortion should always be an available option.

All three can be used by someone who holds a pro-choice view in a discussion. The problem is that this makes constructive discussion difficult. It is like swinging between two extremes. The person may want to argue the general case, but if met with resistance, they can switch over to the special cases (which may be more difficult for the pro-life person to defend against). If the pro-life participant in the discussion fails to make a convincing counter argument, this weakens their position and the pro-choice participant can more easily argue the general case. If the pro-life participant is trying to build a coherent argument for one case, it may be derailed by this kind of shifting of the discussion.

Note that convincing someone that abortion is moral in the general case, implies that abortion would also be moral in the special cases. However, if abortion is considered moral in the special case, it may not necessarily be moral in the general case. On the other hand, if abortion is considered immoral in the special case, it will also be immoral in the general case. So, ideally, the pro-choice person will want to argue the legitimacy of abortion in the general case, whereas the pro-life participant will want to demonstrate that abortion is illegitimate even in the special cases. It is important to be aware of this, as this can mean that two people may very well try to approach a broad discussion on abortion from two different angles, which can lead to misunderstandings and frustrations.

Conducting a Constructive Argument

One way in which to conduct the discussion in a constructive manner is to, at the onset, agree on which case is going to be discussed: the morality of the general case, or the morality of one or both of the special cases? Once this has been agreed upon, do not allow the focus of the discussion to be changed.

Pro-life Arguments

There are many complex arguments for and against abortion. In this section I am only going to briefly outline how I would address the abovementioned cases.

- **Abortion in the case of rape**: Abortion is usually argued for in this case because the woman who was the victim will suffer lifelong (or, at least, nine months) of constant reminders of that terrible and traumatic event. This is typically an argument from conjecture and not fact (there have been women who have successfully and happily raised their children who were conceived in rape), and also ignores the other negative long term medical and psychological effects which an abortion usually entails. But, essentially, aborting a child conceived in rape is punishing him or her for the wrongs of their father, which is not allowed in *any* other case in the law. In this sense, the child is also a victim. If we want to allow a mother to "heal" from a rape through the act of killing, it should also be allowed that the mother can kill her rapist. Again, this is unthinkable in the law.
- **Aborting foetuses with undesirable conditions**: Here I would jump straight to Godwin's Law [2]: this is nothing other than eugenics and is what the Nazis did. All people should have a right to life, irrespective of their physical or mental capabilities. To abort a child who is projected to have a physical or mental disability, is to exchange anything good which that child may experience in life for the personal comfort of the parents (or carers, should the child be given up for adoption or over to an organisation which takes care of children with such conditions). If someone admits that they are fine with eugenics, then there is not much you can say against that, but they will then hold socially impalpable view.
- **Aborting a foetus because it is the woman's choice**: This really plays into the modern social disease of narcissism. The parents who willing engaged in the act of coitus which led to the conception of the child, and who abort the child, shrugs off the responsibility which naturally should be theirs. This case is the most difficult to argue against, though, not because the pro-choice arguments are so strong, but so stubborn. A dichotomy is created between the rights of the child and the rights of the mother, and each side digs into their position. That is why it may be best to address the narcissism and show how that is not moral.

Conclusion

There are variants on the arguments for the legitimacy of abortion. I believe that, essentially, such variants can essentially be traced back to the ones mentioned in this article. For example, some may say that a child should not grow up in a self-admitted "bad" home. However, the child can still be carried to term and then given up to foster care. So this is a variant of shrugging off responsibility (although not as narcissistic as those who want arbitrary abortions).

Remember that the issue of abortion is essentially about life and death. That makes it very significant. The issue is whether the killing is legitimate or not. If someone is pro-life, they believe it is not legitimate, which makes their cause incredibly important. And so, to engage in these discussions, we should never want to win arguments over winning people. We want all people to understand the value of life as we do. Thankfully this is a cause that unite many different kinds of people who hold different kinds of beliefs. Let us learn to work together, and argue in such a way which is respectful, constructive and persuasive, even to those who do not share our worldview.

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