Rationalising Infanticide and the Implications Thereof **[1]**

Submitted by Wessel on Monday, 5 March 2012 - 09:04



Read time: 10 minutes
If the same arguments were applied to infanticide [the killing of infants] that are used for abortion, how would it look? This was the tongue-in-cheek question asked [2] by student Murray Vasser late last month. This line-of-thought should not be anything new for serious pro-life/anti-abortion campaigners, ethicists and apologists. It is reminiscent of what Professor Peter Singer [3] has been teaching for years. Singer is a Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University. Singer teaches that human life is, strictly speaking, no more valuable than that of other animals. If there is any worth in a human life, it is that of the healthy, and fully mentally developed and mature. The implication of this is that Singer believes that not only abortion is legitimate, but also after-birth killing of babies1 before they reach a certain degree of self-awareness (not to mention the legitimate murder of the mentally disabled and comatose). Singer's stance is staggeringly powerful, and this has led him to be recognised [4] as a powerful adversary to religion. To quote:

> We believe his blend of philosophical sophistication, extremism, and high public profile makes him the most formidable living atheist in the world.

What Vasser's direct motivation for writing his article was, I do not know, but it clearly seems to be a response to the teachings of Singer. It put in sight something which has been on the mind of academics to show how distasteful the reality of such a worldview would be.

It turned out, however, that Vasser article followed shortly on the heels of another article, this time an academic article. In it, the authors—Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva—formally recommend Singer's view on "after-birth abortion". They recommend the term "after-birth abortion" *in lieu* of "infanticide", because "the moral status of the individual killed is comparable with that of a fetus (on which 'abortions' in the traditional sense are performed) rather than to that of a child"2. But, with all due respect, the article clearly endorses infanticide. The decision on whether the infant will live will be up to the parents (presumable the mother), with doctors being able to make recommendations.

These articles highlight the facts that the two sides of the abortion debate are becoming increasingly polarised. When applying logic and reason, it is difficult to justify occupying some sort of middle-ground, such as "abortion is acceptable as long as it happens in the first (or second) trimester". Pro-life activists (especially Christians apologists) have been arguing for some time that such are

nonsensical views to hold, as one must either accept a foetus as a human being from conception, or hold to a nihilistic, utilitarian view, such as that of Singer.

I recently noticed a quip on a private discussion board: if there is nothing morally wrong with infanticide, what about the "rape of newborns" (infantophilia)[3]? Rape is defined as

> Unlawful sexual activity and usually sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against the will usually of a female or with a *person* who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent.[4]

The emphasis above was added. Now, returning to the article by Giubilini and Minerva:

> Both a fetus and a newborn certainly are human beings and potential persons, but neither is a 'person' in the sense of 'subject of a moral right to life'. We take 'person' to mean an individual who is capable of attributing to her own existence some (at least) basic value such that being deprived of this existence represents a loss to her.

So, neither an embryo, nor a foetus, nor an infant is considered to be a person. That means that not only killing them is legitimate, but so is sexual intercourse, as the definition of rape (if one accepts the definition of personhood laid out above) precludes sexual intercourse of newborns.

I must wonder whether Singer, Giubilini and Minerva have thought about this particular consequence of what they are saying. Perhaps, perhaps not. But let us look at the implications. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*[5], infantophilia is considered a *paraphilia* ("a general term for sexual kinks", see the following link). In the pending DSM-5, a distinction is made between paraphilias and *paraphilic disorders* (of which pedophilia would still be one, because pedophilia regards "persons"). This distinction allows the DSM to "[say] sexual kinks are basically okay". To quote [5] from one of the experts working on the DSM-5:

> The Paraphilias Sub-Work Group recognized from the outset that there are many shades of grey between typical sexual behaviour, paraphilias, and paraphilic disorders. The important thing for us was distinguishing between benign paraphilias versus paraphilic disorders that cause real anguish to the individual or predispose the individual to violate the rights of other *people* or harm them in serious ways.
>
> Dr Ray Blanchard

Emphasis added. Much seems to hinging on the word "people".

Let us grant, for argument's sake, that it can be argued that "after-birth abortion" is morally acceptable, but infantophilia is not. One rationale behind this could be that a foetus has the status of being a "potential-person" (from Giubilini and Minerva). Sexual intercourse with a potential-person could, potentially, have severe negative long-term effects on the person if that potential-person were to mature into a person. This argument seems self-defeating to me, because denying life to a potential-person has a *severe* negative long-term effect on the potential-person who would otherwise have matured into personhood! But, again, let us grant the argument. The reality is that the mess becomes even worse. If it is morally acceptable to murder an infant, but not to rape an infant (lest that infant suffers from psychological damage as a consequence, although there is *prima facie* not anything morally wrong with it), then an infant can only be "legitimately" raped if the infant is to be killed as well. As a result, we have now arrived at the result that "rape is not okay, but murder and murder-rape is"!

Of course there are many issues what I have not addressed. For example, I cannot fathom that any

law, no matter how liberal, would allow for the legitimate rape of any infant. However, as with the life of the infant, I would presume that the say ultimately lie with the parents. And I think that we can agree that that is not comforting at all!

Another example of morally repugnant behaviour which would be allowable if we take rights away from infants, is human trafficking. If an infant has no moral rights, and the parents—specifically the mother—has "ownership" of the infant, would that not imply that the infant could be sold (or given away) in the same way that a puppy or kitten could? If this is the case, an unwanted pregnancy could, for example, be turned into a lucrative opportunity by engaging in a business deal with a sleazy Asian gentleman who can promise one thing: that she will never be heard from again.

In conclusion, I want to remark that I am approaching the belief that the world is at a tipping-point. The point centres around morality. As people such as Singer push the boundaries into extremes, the secular world will have to make a tough decision: it will either renounce such moral liberalism, renounce post-modernism and draw closer to sources of morality, such as religion, or it will embrace a worldview which does not include the "dated" idea of morality. And as the number of morally liberal bioethicists increase, the latter seems definitely [6] possible; hence the quote regarding Singer at the beginning of this article. However, this too will not be new: we shall merely be returning to a familiar passage of history.

> If we present a man with a concept of man which is not true, we may well corrupt him. When we present man as an automaton of reflexes, as a mind-machine, as a bundle of instincts, as a pawn of drives and reactions, as a mere product of instinct, heredity and environment, we feed the nihilism to which modern man is, in any case, prone. I became acquainted with the last stage of that corruption in my second concentration camp, Auschwitz. The gas chambers of Auschwitz were the ultimate consequence of the theory that man is nothing but the product of heredity and environment—or, as the Nazi liked to say, of 'Blood and Soil'. I am absolutely convinced that the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidanek were ultimately prepared not in some Ministry or other in Berlin, but rather at the desks and in the lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers.
>
> Viktor Frankl

- 1. The killing of babies as a means of quasi-"birth control" is, of course, nothing new. This was one of few "safe" options available to prostitutes [7] prior to the advent of modern birth control methods. And, yes, I am aware of God's order to kill the babies of the enemies of Israel in Deuteronomy 2:34, 3:6 *et cetera*. I am planning to address this topic in another post. However, I shall now note that Singer would probably not think anything about the killing of these babies, while other atheists, paradoxically, are appalled [8] by it, regardless of their own views on morality [9].
- 2. It is common in the abortion debate for pro-choice activists and scientists to subtly twist definitions to suit their agendas. They "out-define" their opponents to promote their own worldview by making up the rules as they go along. Here we see a classical example: "Let's not think of infants as infants, so then we are not committing infanticide."
- 3. Bringing sexual intercourse into the discussion seems only appropriate. Despite pro-choice advocates often trumping up the "safety" of mother, most [10] abortions which are carried out are because of inconvenience, not health issues. To put it bluntly, the child must die because of the parents' sexual escapades. But sex is a "right", it seems. "If you don't want to get pregnant, then don't have sex." If someone objects to that argument, then why deny someone their right to infantophilia?
- 4. See Merriam-Webster [11].
- 5. General disclaimer: I am not a qualified psychiatrist and therefore cannot authoritatively apply or interpret the DSM.

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