

Is Abortion Moral?

A friend of mine had a conversation recently and the topic turned to conscience. His friend insisted that they'd never done wrong. *"Not even a white lie?"* he asked. *"Well,"* they explained, *"I have lied of course, but it wasn't a sin because I did it to protect my feelings."*

This mindset runs deep in the Western world today. We've made our feelings and desires the ultimate good. Any action is justified if it makes us feel better. Freedom is held up as the ultimate virtue, and even trumps tolerance as society requires us to tolerate everyone and everything unless they impinge on our freedom to do as we please.

There's a lot of talk about rights, but not a lot of talk about responsibilities. Have we got it the right way round? Should our freedom ever have limits?

Is there a limit to our freedom?

Where does human freedom and responsibility come together? Must human freedom, to be truly life-affirming, be bound by any moral restraint? Who defines what moral standards should be, and why would I desire to subject my freedom to these standards, for isn't freedom a virtue in and of itself?

In the atheistic worldview devoid of justifiable objective moral standards, human freedom is truly unbound from any objective restraint. We each get to define freedom according to our own desires, and there's no ultimate authority to adjudicate. This is a significant reason why the bible is viewed with increasing hostility in the West. The Christian worldview teaches that freedom is not just the ability to do what we want, but what we should. It claims that there are objective moral truths that don't depend on the opinion or preferences we so highly exalt today, that objective moral duties as God defines them are critical to freedom as a whole.

This is contrary to a secular world that gravitates to the idea that any restraint placed on our desires is immoral, as freedom is goodness. We want to be the measure of all things, to remove objective moral standards as taught by the Christian faith, and set up our own subjective standards in its place. We become gods, the judges of all things. But mere freedom from restraint, to do whatever thy will, to obey only the self and the fulfilment of our private desires, does not encourage us to engage in the great quests to fulfil our purpose or better the world.

The Christian view holds that there is a purpose to our lives, something we were intended to pursue beyond ourselves which ultimately fulfils us. This purpose calls us into a life of difficulty and is reached despite or even through suffering and self-giving love, not self-serving *"freedom."* Without this we are purposeless. Justice, goodness are unbelievable categories within the framework of naturalism. If we are just the random collocation of atoms, a blip on the radar screen of time happening to be here, then we have no absolute duties beyond fulfilling our personal desire. **None.**

In a world where our preferences become the ultimate guide of our lives, practically anything is permissible except the idea that some things shouldn't be. Take abortion; it is viewed as an outrage to tell a woman that she has broken a moral boundary when denying the life she most likely choose to create, 99% of aborted children are driven by consensual sex. So we ask ourselves, is abortion moral? To answer this we must address two critical questions: Where does life derive its value i.e. what is a human worth? And when does life start?

What is a human worth?

The only way we can have intrinsic worth is if we were created and therefore exist for a purpose determined by an entity of essential worth. For example, everything that goes on in the natural world can only have meaning or value in reference to something else. Take a £20 note; it's certainly not valuable in its material and if all the humans were gone, it would have no value. Its value is only based on the value we place on it. In the same way, there can be no objective value to reality unless there is an ultimate meaning-giver himself, God. For life to have absolute value, it must find its purpose, or intention, in reference to something that exists necessarily (that which is without reference to anything else, i.e. transcendent), and as intentions can only be the product of conscious minds, that reference must be what we call God.

In the denial of God, human life is simply an accident of nature, the result of the blind interaction of chance and necessity. There is no transcending context to justify the intrinsic value of life or the existence of objective morals, we are essentially just purposeless electro-biochemical machines controlled by our mindless genes. The concept that humans hold an inherent value and *intrinsic* worth is mainly based on the Judeo-Christian idea that we are made in the image of God. Reject God and suddenly you have to start again, explaining why one particular creature, thrown up by the blind forces of time, chance and natural selection mixing and chopping atoms and chemicals for several billion years possesses inalienable value, whereas amoeba and eggplants do not. **If what we call "life" is merely atoms mindlessly ping-pong around then no human life has any more value than any other collection of atoms in this universe.** In this view, we are left to resort to our value being *extrinsic*, using external factors to measure our worth. Factors such as intelligence, health, usefulness to society, physical appearance, wealth, the capability of passing genes... But in this view equality of human value doesn't work because even if you currently measure up to one of these standards, one day you won't. You will age, you will weaken, and our financial worth will fluctuate. Morally we lack consistency, physically our bodies are changing, more so decaying. So who are we if everything about us is only temporary?

If life bears no intrinsic value, anyone can then say "*this life is valuable, this other life not so much.*" Based upon evaluating another life's sacredness indifferent to our own due to a worth we give measured on subjective external factors. This allows us to excuse our actions against those lives or separate them from us. For example, In the era of the black slave trade, a law was placed in 1662 Virginia "*that all children born in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of their mother.*" In other words, if your mum was a slave, you were born a slave, if your mum was free, you were born free. This law states that an external factor, such as an organisation, entity, individual, can determine your worth before you are even born. In a similar sense, abortion determines the rights and value of another life before born, in accordance of the mother. If the value of life is a purely subjective matter none of us can then say this is objectively wrong - it's our word against theirs with no objective standard to arbitrate. By denying any intrinsic value that a life holds, we have erased any rights that human may have and so can excuse aborting that life. So it really comes down to whether that life is ultimately desired or suitable for us or not. If the mother doesn't feel suitable, if the child wasn't intended or if it's not the right circumstance, then one can excuse denying that life. We have decided that the child's worth is purely dependent on its mother's choice rather than having any worth itself. We eliminate babies we conclude may not be proper for our lifestyle and keep the ones we want. The idea of being killed off as soon as we stop being useful to society seems dystopian, but that's exactly what we've become desensitised to. As Ronald Reagan said, "*I've noticed that everyone who is for abortion has already been born.*"

We have become unaccountable. If a baby were killed inside by abuse and violence on a pregnant woman, then the attacker would rightly be sentenced to prison for slaughter. Yet, the same law

permits a mother who should love her child as one bearing her own image to kill it in the womb as a human right? We proclaim it's pro-choice to have an abortion but are we not just escaping the consequence of our choice by taking all choices away from another human being? In elevating ourselves as god without the benefit of divine wisdom, we have decided that life's value is in reference to our own autonomy, that we can dictate the value of another life. In doing so, we have become devils.

“My moral right”

The Christian view is that life has intrinsic value and is therefore sacred, and therefore abortion does break a moral boundary. To deny the life of an unborn child implies denying a value which you have no authority to determine.

And if you are convinced that abortion is a moral right, let me leave you with this analogy to consider: Let's say a violent storm suddenly hits a ship out at sea. Out of the 100 people on the ship, five live but the rest drown and die. For argument sake, let's say it's an act of God. Wouldn't most people be outraged? Why not let them all live, *“God is immoral!”* Many would say. Now if this is indeed an act of God that 95 die, 5 live and He chose for it to happen, you're calling his decision immoral because he allowed death to occur over life. So what about when you have the choice whether someone lives or dies within you, explain to me how that's your moral right? When God plays God you consider him to be immoral, when you want to play god you consider it your moral right; there is a violent contradiction in the abortion position. So tell me, if you have the opportunity to see life or death, which is moral? Abortion, being morally wrong, is therefore an unlawful taking of a life whether the government deems it or not.

We are playing a dangerous game. Every time you get comfortable breaking a moral boundary, by nature we gradually get comfortable in breaking the next moral barrier, until a few generations along the line we completely drop our moral compass altogether. In this case of abortion, even if the parent doesn't wish to or is unable to bring up their child, then as a final option one should consider the child for adoption, that at the cost of 9 months of one life another may have a full life. If we thought about the value of the child's life equal to our own, then it changes the whole outcome.

“It's not a human”

A common argument to bypass any conviction on this matter is to consider the unborn child as not a child at all. That there is no new person in formation and therefore aborting the “fetus” does not impinge on the life of a separate entity, since that life by this view hasn't begun yet. A common phrase used by the pro-abortion community today is *“don't tell a woman what to do with her body”*, which carries the assumption that it's just her body, that the new life doesn't exist yet. But does it? Scientifically speaking, the process of your life has begun with only the difference of degree, size, level of development, environment and level of dependency.

When I hear someone say well it's not a human being because the life is not fully developed, then do you humanely put to death the young child who hasn't fully developed or the disabled adult who hasn't developed properly? If not, by what standard do you draw your line? When I hear someone say it's not a human being because the life is dependent on the mother, then do you prevent justice for the elderly, the brain dead, the one in a coma who is dependent on the support of others for their lives? How do you justify this standard? Much the opposite - the most vulnerable amongst us deserve more care and protection as our instinct tells us as soon as we hold a newborn baby.

Let's say we play a game of dictating when life starts:

1. What about week 24 in the womb? Your baby is long and lean and developing.
2. What about week 20? Your baby is swallowing more, sucking its thumb. The baby can hear you.
3. What about week 12? The baby's brain is rapidly growing; the toes are curling.
4. Week 10 the organs and structure are in place.
5. Week 8 you can see eyes, arms, legs and ears forming.
6. Before this you have a pumping heart and developing nerves.

When is it okay to terminate and erase that child as if it's not life? Does the birth canal really magically turn a lump of disposable cells into a fully-fledged human with rights and value? To be honest, I don't think there are many who in their right mind really believe that in the womb the child is not a life. For example, if a woman can choose to abort then can a man choose to abandon? If a mother is pregnant and she has the freedom to kill or 'end' her child, then by that same token, the father has the choice to abandon and leave his child likewise. You can't have it both ways, demanding that the father take responsibility for the child while the mother can neglect it. We know that if a man abandons his pregnant partner, he has left more than just her, he has neglected his responsibility to remain for his child's sake. We know that there is another life involved, that there is more at stake here.

For those genuinely unsure how to answer the question of when life starts, consider this illustration - say I'm in construction and I go to blow up an old building. I'm not sure if anyone's in there but I'm assuming no-one is, so I go ahead and demolish it. Would you be okay with that, or would you insist that I be certain first? The answer is obvious, you would want me to be sure. So would you also argue a mother can 'terminate' a baby even though she may not be aware whether it is a life or not?

“What about rape?”

“What about the circumstance of rape?” a friend asked me while we respectfully discussed our differences on abortion. We gave each other some challenging thoughts, but with this, I was unsure how to answer. Out of all the circumstances of abortion, I find this one the most challenging. Although it represents less than 1% of abortion cases it nonetheless carries a tremendous amount of sensitivity to it, and for obvious reasons, it's a very emotionally charged question. Yet I think it would be an error to think the mother is the only victim. Now this is not diminishing the crime of rape and the justice which should be demanded as the rapist should rightly be judged and held accountable. Nor does this ignore the pain a woman may feel after being violated in such an unjust manner. But should the child who committed no crime suffer being aborted for the rape crime of the father? It is the perpetrator alone who should be held accountable so that justice is done, and mothers should be supported as much as possible by family, friends and society. The circumstance of one's conception should not diminish the value of that innocent life to pay the penalty for a crime that life did not commit. An old biblical passage in the book of Ezekiel clarifies this where it writes: *“A child should not suffer for the sins of the father.”* I think most would agree with this statement.

People who are unfortunately a product of rape have lives of equal value to my own. Surely no one would be justified to say it would be excusable for them not to exist because of the circumstance of their birth? Surely the circumstance of your birth does not define the value of your life? In a recent article a woman revealed that she had been raped. She became pregnant, struggled with the idea of abortion, and in the end gave birth to her child. *“A beautiful boy”*, she proclaimed, that despite the awful circumstance of his birth, *“he is first and foremost my son.”* What an incredible response to such an awful situation.

Reconciling abortion

No one can revert the past, and no one has had a perfect past. We are all guilty of breaking moral boundaries so it would be hypocritical to reject those who have previously carried out an abortion. The blame for abortion also lies at the feet of all of us who are part of a society that separates sex from commitment, creates an ecosystem of unplanned pregnancy, and fails to support women who find themselves in that situation. I have never seen anyone make an alternative decision from being rejected, hated or condemned. Never. For a woman who is pregnant at a time not planned for, she can often feel incredibly vulnerable, anxious and even scared about what the future may hold. These feelings can be incredibly powerful and convincing in tempting a woman to choose abortion, and so we must assist with gentleness, care and compassion if we are to help someone on this matter, to bring recognition to the *right* decision in taking responsibility in *valuing* the lives of those involved. Roughly 50 million babies are aborted each year, it is difficult to see how we can just “brush” over this.

Ending violence

How do we define violence? The dictionary definition of violence as “*behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill*”, doesn’t cover all bases since attitudes, institutions, laws and judgements may all be violent. Physical force is not a necessary condition for defining violence, for example, the threat of violence is often just as effective in compelling behaviour as its administration. Violence is not expressed by any obvious criteria. An act may be violent in degrees, or it may be violent in effect; violence may be obvious or disguised; it may be overt or subtle; it may be confined, regulated, sealed off or liberate; it may be irrational, careless; verbal or hidden, there is nothing obvious that clearly defines violence.

It is difficult to look at the twentieth century with ease; it was bloody. Very bloody. Two hundred and thirty-one million died violent deaths in the twentieth century: shot, gassed, worked to death, experimented on, deliberately abandoned to famines, bombed, invaded by foreign armies, sent over violent borders... Taken across history, the murder of the twentieth century is an unmissable spike in the violence of mankind, the Holocaust and the Gulag being quick examples. Violence is not on the decline, quite the opposite, and it’s not hard to see why. No matter how remote or distant, great crimes still have the power to influence the future and no punishment has ever been able to prevent the committing of crimes. Think about it – history reveals that regardless of the punishment, once a specific crime has appeared for the first time, its reappearance is more likely than its initial emergence could ever have been. Violence is on the rise.

In the middle ages people fought with swords and acts of violence were gruesome. Reaching into the twentieth century, nation rose against nation and violence was displayed with guns and gas ovens. Genocide was the new homicide, mass murder the new murder. Today life is killed where it should be safest – its mother’s womb. Violence is not administered via guns but by law and freedom to kill at the cost of personal circumstance is the new ‘moral right’. In the early 20th century Nazis justified the extermination of Jews according to the circumstances of their birth by diminishing their humanity. We are now gods who decide human worth, and with it, we are more violent though more subtle than ever before. Abortion speaks for itself: over 1.5 billion aborted and unwanted children. Society is truly more savage than the middle ages. Abortion is violent. The worst part is that we are numb to it; we poorly discern the difference between right and wrong.

The philosophy that attempts to justify abortion stems from an atheistic framework. Without a transcendent context (God) we have no ultimate meaning or purpose from which to derive any intrinsic value. If life has no inherent value then we, as humanity, imperfect and finite, can without

any objective stance decide what is and isn't worthy or regarded as life.

However, if it is true that irrespective of the circumstances of our conception every one of us were created by God then God's purpose and love for us confer equal value on every human life. Thus life has intrinsic value and if life has intrinsic value then human rights are justified, equality is a must and discrimination is unlawful. In the Christian worldview, the measure of human value is not biological, intellectual, financial, aesthetic, or even someone else's desire, circumstance or view. Life's worth does not come from the limited perspective of a changing world but from an eternal God who so loved the world that he gave his own likeness, Jesus Christ, to pay the judgement for our moral imperfection so that we have the right to become children of God. And He will never abort one of His own. There is no greater worth than that.