

dialogue

THE ABORTION DEBATE

The controversy surrounding the abortion issue has surfaced periodically in the press with the issue coming to the forefront again with the opening of Dr. Morgentaler's abortion clinic in Toronto. Excalibur deals with the issue in the following debate for and against abortion by staff writers Greg Gaudet and Paul Pivato respectively.

paul pivato

After the Civil War, blacks in the US gained the status of "people," and in 1927 the British Privy Council ruled that Canadian women were to be legally considered "persons." Blacks and women, long oppressed, were finally given legal rights. But today, unborn children are still not considered "people" in the eyes of the law. Because of this they are denied legal protection. Because of this, they are denied the basic right to life.

The same ugly rationalization used against blacks and women has surfaced one more: unborn children are not "people," and therefore have no rights. Legalized abortion is the greatest travesty of civil rights in this century and, as is usually the case when human rights are trampled on, it has the blessings of the status quo and conventional morality. By a strange twist, it has now become radical to oppose abortion.

What was unthinkable only 30 years ago is now an everyday part of Western society, carried out in our antiseptic hospitals by skilled technicians—unseen, unheard, handsomely profitable. The liberals and civil rights activists who have traditionally defended the weak and oppressed have fled from the cause of unborn children.

Who will be the next to go—the retarded, the infirm, the mentally ill? When will they no longer be regarded as fully human? When will the legal subtleties, the economic necessities and the "humanitarian concerns" exclude another group of unwanted people? Logic only dictates that they too will soon be murdered.

But murder is a nasty word: it makes people flinch, and it's rather melodramatic. In order to strip murder of any primitive moral connotations, I'll use instead the word 'terminate,' which is harmless enough.

The Nazis used to terminate unwanted people, and now we do as well. This analogy isn't very original, it's not even provocative. It is, however, quite clear. We already share with the Nazis the same bureaucratic, clinical termination; we use the same euphemisms, the same eugenics, the same political definitions of who is fully human and fit to live. It's not very nice to dredge up old Nazi atrocities, I must admit. But it's also not necessary; the medical barbarism is happening here and now, carried out by respectable people.

We are terminating our weak and unwanted.

The thought that an unborn child is not human never occurs to illiterate, uneducated people. Rather, such gross perversions of thought are only made by educated people—by people who bleed with concern for sociological imbalance, by people who need a little more scientific evidence.

I'd like to digress for a moment, though, and leave all this sombre talk about life and termination. I'd like to talk about Dr. Henry Morgentaler. Not many people know this, but Dr. Morgentaler, media celebrity and pro-abortion spokesman, is also somewhat of a poet. His poetry is not very good (I think you'll concur), but it is fascinating and worth reading. Here's one small poem:

*My heart wants a God
My mind says NO
My mind wants a leader
My heart says NO.
Out of this tug-of-war
I emerge as God and leader
And I tremble
For having dared to blaspheme
The Heavenly and Earthly powers.
(from Morgentaler, by Eleanor Wright Perline)*

Hopefully Morgentaler is once again seeing a psychoanalyst.

The pro-abortion forces are becoming more militant, more respectable. Morgentaler and his brood are growing in numbers, openly defying the law. Abortion clinics (under a different name) will soon be sprouting up in your neighborhoods and local plazas. Perhaps they will be franchised.

And yet abortion will one day be stopped. Not in this decade certainly, and perhaps not even in this century, but it will be stopped, and the reason is very simple: not because the anti-abortionists have more money, or more power, or more people—not for any of these reasons. It will be stopped because the pro-abortionists seek their own selfish ends, whereas the anti-abortionists are fighting for others—for people they haven't seen and don't know; fighting so that they too may have the right to live. That's why, in the end, the anti-abortionists will win.

greg gaudet

A majority of Canadians believe that abortion is a question which should be left to a woman and her doctor according to reliable, accepted public opinion polls.

This fact makes it clear that anti-abortion groups (they prefer to be called 'pro-life' in an effort to characterize the pro-choice movement as 'anti-life') are wrong in attempting to eliminate the possibility for women to have access to safe abortions.

Anti-abortion groups believe the fetus is a human being and no one can deny them that belief.

Why, though, do they attempt to deny others their beliefs? Why do they try to dictate their own values to those who might disagree with them?

The anti-abortion lobby argues they are protecting the rights of the unborn child. Half of what they say cannot be denied . . . the fetus has certainly not yet been born. What can be argued, though, is whether or not the fetus is in fact a child.

A woman who believes that human life begins only after a baby has taken its first breath does not see the fetus in the same way as an anti-abortionist. The fetus has only the *potential* to become a human being. At this point it is wholly dependent on outside sources (usually its natural mother) for the most basic functions of life.

An abortion, then, is nothing more than a procedure to remove a potential for life.

There will always be women who view abortion as such. Consequently, abortions will take place whether the law prohibits it or not. It is our responsibility to ensure the operation is conducted, not in a germ-infested, dirty room with the accompanying hardships for women, as has been the case in the past, but in the safe, clean facilities that modern medicine can today provide. This would maintain the woman's physical and emotional well-being.

Interestingly, the 'right-to-lifers' refuse to consider the plight of the *already born* and *already human* mother. They expect her to endure emotional and certain physical harm to protect what many people consider only a fetus.

It may be that the anti-abortionists believe the welfare of the fetus is more important than the woman since 'a woman's role in society is to bear children.'

This connecting of the anti-abortion lobby with archaic, sexist views of what a woman should be is not an unfair generalization. Groups such as REAL Women of Canada, who oppose abortion, believe the workplace is for men, not women.

Also interesting is the lack of political and economic support the anti-abortion forces offer to unwed mothers and poor families. Phyllis Schlafly and her Eagle Forum (the American forerunner of REAL Women) loudly condemns abortion; and continued spending for welfare and other social programs; and the right of a woman to earn a decent wage should she, God forbid, actually leave her natural domain of home and go out to work. Why aren't anti-abortionists willing to take responsibility for a child born to parents who can ill-afford it, economically or emotionally?

One answer might lie in the fact that abortions of the type that are presently illegal in Canada—those performed by a free-standing clinic—are available only to women who can afford to travel to the U.S. Such a situation is repugnant to anyone who believes in anything close to equal treatment under the law. The issue of abortion then is not merely one of values, but also one of class.

"But wait!" the anti-abortion groups cry out. "What about the long waiting lists in adoption agencies?" Three problems: One, a single mother or young girl is likely to encounter humiliation and emotional hardship should she decide to complete her pregnancy. Second, there is no guarantee of anonymity. Should an adopted child decide to search for its natural mother, the courts will not attempt to stop him/her. Finally, what of the long list of non-caucasian or older children up for adoption? Why won't the pro-lifers discuss them?

Anti-abortionists continue to harp on the profits that a doctor like Henry Morgentaler would reap from performing abortions. According to the *Globe and Mail*, Dr. Morgentaler owes hundreds of thousands of dollars in lawyers' fees. In addition, he is a brilliant doctor who could at any time choose to enter into a more accepted, more lucrative practice. Profit is not Morgentaler's motivation. He is providing safe, problem-free abortions for women who might not otherwise be able to afford them, or who might pay a sleazy quack and endanger their lives.

Although abortions under certain circumstances are legal today, they did not use to be. During this time the anti-abortion forces used to hold up the law as right and just—something that was to be obeyed.

Once the law was changed—in the same democratic process under which abortions were made illegal—the law suddenly became wrong. Anti-abortionists have begun thumbing their noses at the law. This has manifested itself in several of the most disgusting actions to come out of the abortion controversy. One, of course, is the totally unjustified harassment of Dr. Morgentaler by Ontario's Attorney General at the behest of a loud minority of anti-abortionists. Even after the time, trouble and expense of due process—and Morgentaler's acquittal by a jury of his peers on *valid legal grounds*—the Ontario government saw fit to appeal the jury's decision. It's comforting to know that our provincial government has such faith in the judicial system which it has been elected to uphold.

The second travesty of justice on the part of so-called 'pro-lifers' are the sickening acts of violence and terrorism against abortion clinics and their staffs. Although no one has yet been seriously injured by any of the bomb blasts caused by people who profess to support a right to life, one wonders how long before a death will take place.

Finally, Joe Borowski, Manitoba's infamous and loud supporter of the anti-abortion lobby, has offered to act as a go-between for anyone wishing to assassinate Dr. Morgentaler. Such a selective concern for life does not lend weight to his 'pro-life' stand.

All of this, however, skirts two remaining issues.

The first is least important of the two, but should be mentioned in the context of the article which you are presently reading: what role do men have in deciding for women their right to have an abortion? I feel uncomfortable in the knowledge that two men are using a forum like *Excalibur* to debate the issue since I know neither of us will ever have to face the experience of even being pregnant. It is not for men to dictate to women whether or not they should have an abortion.

My second point concerns the right of women to be treated, not as property or misguided children, but as people who are capable of deciding what should or should not take place inside their own individual bodies. Regardless of what you or I think.