

# Thoughts on Abortion

7/14/2022

Bill Edwards

What should one say about this bitterest of controversies, whose banning is the “crown jewel” of the religious right, and protecting is no less vital to the feminist left? It seems to me that the moral argument is quite similar to that of two other questions: vegetarianism and nonviolence.

Many people, almost all of them political and social conservatives, seem to argue that the fetus is morally a person “from the moment of conception,” and thus abortion at any time, anywhere, for any reason is murder, and must be banned.

Many people, mostly political and social liberals (progressives?), argue that sentient animals are morally “persons,” and thus killing them for food, clothing, or medicine is murder, and must be avoided at all costs.

Many people, generally but not entirely, religious progressives, say that the use of force, especially lethal force, is morally evil, even in self-defense, and good people should renounce it and seek to abolish it.

My own response to each of these groups is that I do not doubt their sincerity, and I sympathize with their conscientiousness, but that I cannot agree with their reasoning. Certainly, I could never support giving their moral judgement the force of criminal law. (Vegetarians do not seem eager to do this; anti-abortionists are desperate to do so.)

I don't doubt that the fetus is alive, human, and has the genetic information of a unique human being; is it therefore a “person” in the meaning of criminal law? Surely not. An unfertilized egg or a sperm is also alive and human and has about half the genetic information of a unique human being. If we accept that it is half a person in morality and law, would we not have to require that each fertile female attempt to become pregnant each time she ovulates and each fertile male attempt to impregnate as many women as he can, or be charged with negligent homicide if not murder. Scientifically grounded thinking about the reproduction of humans, as with other animals, requires that we regard it as a necessarily “wasteful” process – many more individuals can be produced than can possibly survive.

To follow the thinking of the “right-to-life” movement to its logical conclusion, we would need to seek death or life in prison not only for abortion providers, but for any woman

who receives or even seeks an abortion for any reason whatever. Most of their advocates deny that this is their goal, but, tragically, the fanatics may rule.