

Wrong about Abortion, Wrong about Human Nature

By Michael Coblenz

Tag: Conservatives are not at war against abortion, they are at war against human nature. And that is a war they will never win.

South Dakota recently enacted a near total ban on abortion. This marks the most extreme action in Conservatives' long battle to "end abortion." But despite conservatives' fervor, most of the public remains ambivalent: they support a woman's right to choose even though they find abortion morally troubling, if not offensive. According to a recent poll, only 16% of the public think abortion should never be allowed, and only 19% believe it should be legal in all circumstances. The rest of the public (including me) generally supports the right to an abortion, but is willing to accept varying levels of restrictions.

Conservatives decry this type of nuanced thinking as "moral relativism." Let me suggest, however, that this view shows not contradiction or hypocrisy, but an understanding of the reality of human nature. Conservatives' attitude about abortion, on the other hand, and about the views of the murky middle (those of us who support abortion with restriction) reveal a fundamental ignorance of human nature. And because of this ignorance, Conservatives may be able to make abortion illegal (or they may not, the court is quite literally still out) but they won't be able to eliminate it.

Changing abortion laws – whether by repealing Roe v. Wade, or enacting more and more

restrictions on access to abortion – might make it nearly impossible to get an abortion, or might even make it illegal, but it won't make it go away. Abortion has existed since the beginning of recorded human history (and likely before, if observations of pre-literate primitive societies are any indication). Abortion exists in every human society regardless of legal or cultural opposition. And it will continue to exist regardless of the law.

If conservatives want to end abortion – and not just make it illegal – they will have to fundamentally change human nature, and it is difficult to imagine that human nature is going to change any time soon.

Abortion happens because unwanted pregnancies happen, and unwanted pregnancies happen because of the fundamental weakness of human beings. People get pregnant because people have sex, and people have sex for two intimately related reasons. First, there is a tremendous physical urge to have sex. We all feel it, we all know it exists, though some might seek to deny it. (The physical urge can be seen in the enormous lengths many animals go to procreate: salmon swim beyond the point of endurance to spawn, cats copulate despite the enormous physical pain, etc.) But beyond the physical, animalistic, urge for sex, humans also have a tremendous urge to bond, to pair, to fall in love. We feel the need for human contact and connection, and in many cases (perhaps far too many cases, particularly when people are young and emotionally immature) we equate the physical contact of sex with the emotional connection of love. We are weak, alone, afraid in the world, and human contact is one way to allay those feeling of emptiness.

Conservatives tend to see people as good or bad, with very little ground in between. In reality,

however, most of us live in that middle ground. We are all deeply flawed creatures, we are all fundamentally fallible, fallen angels, we struggle alone, fumble through life, we are weak, scared, confused, angry, intemperate, lonely, but we muddle through as best we can.

Conservatives' views of human nature are deeply influenced by the doctrine of original sin, which holds that people are inherently sinful and only redeemed through the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Conservatives give lip service to the idea of human fallibility, and in fact much of religious doctrine is based on it, but far too many modern Christian Conservatives see themselves as blessed. They have been saved – redeemed through Christ – and they consider themselves to be among the elect. Redemption is an easy matter: “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9.) Redemption, therefore, is as easy as believing. And since this is a rather simple matter, a relatively low hurdle, those who are not saved have essentially made a choice not to believe. As a result, Conservatives tend to view those who are not saved, those who have not welcomed Jesus in to their lives, as more than merely flawed. They see them as failures, purposefully obdurate, and in many cases just one small step short of evil.

Opponents of abortion are not concerned with the danger of ‘back alley’ abortions because the women who get them are fallen – they are wanton or unchaste at best, sluts at worst – and get what they deserve. The choice for many conservatives, between an unsullied fetus and a clearly sullied woman, is easy.

But the fall from grace is not as precipitous as conservatives see it. It can be little more than a

thoughtless moment, the merest stumble in the journey through life. Should someone be punished – burdened for life, physically damaged, perhaps even killed – for such a stumble? Conservative's say yes because they can't admit the reality of human frailty.

Most people, however, don't share this view. They understand the difference between weakness and wantonness, and they are not willing to punish someone for their weakness. They are willing to give people the ability to make a mistake and not be burdened for life, or physically damaged, or (God forbid) killed in a back alley abortion. And so they grudgingly approve of abortion rights.

Conservatives may think they are fighting abortion, but what they are really struggling against is human nature. And that is a fight that they will never win because they are wrong about abortion and wrong about human nature.

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