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The Political Psychology of Abortion: Some Implications of Free Choice

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Abstract. This article describes some logical implications of a "free choice" position on abortion public policy.

Public policy and related controversies on abortion can have a significant impact on the security of a nation-state. An approved policy can directly influence the incidence, prevalence, and type of people who engage in violating laws based on the policy. This, in turn, can affect the degree to which law and a rule of law significantly controls the behavior of citizens in related and even unrelated areas. An approved policy also can directly influence the strength and content of ethical and moral standards, as well as the standards' influence on the perceptions and behaviors of citizens. Stances on the rule of law and on ethics and morals can affect the development, implementation, and evaluation of security policy.

Within this context, the public policy of allowing women to decide whether or not to terminate a pregnancy--commonly called a "free choice" policy--has some interesting implications. Mainly, the policy seems to severely constrain "free choice." For example, the policy discounts or rejects the notion of choice for the impregnator. This is the case even though various sexual unions resulting in a pregnancy differ widely in terms of whom is most responsible for it.

There may be shared complicity in the case of a man and a woman engaging in sexual intercourse. Or, one or the other, or both, can be initiator and/or aggressor or even the coercer. There may be various intentions permeating the sexual act--some of these intentions changing as the act progresses. Then the members of the sexual union are equal biological contributors to the pregnancy at the point of conception. After this, the woman is chiefly responsible for biologically maintaining the pregnancy, although the man can forcibly and directly or indirectly engage in activities that will terminate the pregnancy. Thus, throughout the sequence from incipient sexual act through conception, then pregnancy, to birth, there are many points of responsibility--each suggestive of the possibility of free choice or the lack thereof for man, woman, or both. Yet as much as "pro-life" or "choice for life" positions might be considered to be constraining the choice of a woman, "free choice" seems to even more constrain the choice of a man.

What if abortion policy dictated some sort of "50-50" arrangement so that a man and woman would have equal choice, and the man and woman disagreed, with the latter wishing to carry to term. A "free choice" position would suggest that the man could then legally absolve himself from paternity responsibilities. If the disagreement was to the converse, the woman could absolve herself from maternity responsibilities after bringing the pregnancy to term. If she terminated the pregnancy, the man could legally demand restitution.

All of the above exposes the too often hidden assumptions of "free choice" positions--primarily that life is terminated by choice, that there is killing. As opposed to tortuously arguing about when the moment of true human life begins, it would seem morally and ethically responsible for "free choice" advocates to admit that life is being terminated when abortion occurs--again that killing occurs.

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Each individual contributing to choice decisions must engage in a legal/ethical/moral calculus. The same is done with the legal actions of other killers--viz., soldiers, police, and juries--and the illegal actions of murderers. (To some there is no difference between the two classes of people). This does not ensure that the best decision is always made. But neither do the two extremes that so often characterize abortion controversy. A serious calculus, meanwhile, ensures a healthy respect for legal, ethical, and moral criteria. And a nation-state's security is strengthened in the process. (See *Aborting the pros and cons of abortion: No escaping the killing fields*. (February 12, 1999). *IBPP*, 6(6); Adamek, R.J. (1974). *Abortion, personal freedom, and public policy*. *Family Coordinator*, 23, 411-419; Linders, A. (1998). *Abortion as a social problem: The construction of "opposite" solutions in Sweden and the United States*. *Social Problems*, 45, 488-509; Lynch, T. (July 5, 2000). *A man's right to choose*. *The New York Times*, p. A21; Markson, S.L. (1982). *Normative boundaries and abortion policy: The politics of morality*. *Research in Social Problems and Public Policy*, 2, 21-33.) (Keywords: Abortion, Security.)