

Abortion? No, Thanks.



Kaunteya das

a member of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness
Founder-*Ācārya*: His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda



EYE of the STORM



“According to Vedic culture, destroying the undeveloped embryo of the soul in the womb is as sinful as killing a cow or a *brāhmaṇa*.”

- SB 9.9.31, purport



To my mother

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Introduction

Well, in this case, “Introduction” can also refer to the introduction of forceps and other tools inside the mother to dismember and extract the baby, piece by piece.

Srila Prabhupada describes:

“Abortion . . . by surgical instrument, they kill, and they take out the child . . . directly killing. They, through some instrument, through the vagina, they kill, cut into pieces, and get out. Living children.” (Morning Walk, Los Angeles, 9 May 1973)



This book is born of sadness. The sadness, shock, and mental agony of discovering that many devotees support terminating pregnancies.

I had my first encounter with the phenomenon in Argentina, in 2018, when that country was in throes of a national referendum on abortion. At that time I heard, with a degree of perplexity, that some devotees were in favor of legalizing abortion; but I was in a different city, I was visiting for a short time, and I had other things on my mind; and so I kind of dismissed the report as a weird but isolated anomaly.

But evidence of such attitudes among Vaisnavas kept piling up. When, relatively recently, I’ve got more involved in social media, the voices of “pro-abortion devotees” (almost an oxymoron) became, or I started perceiving them as, louder, bolder, and more uncompromising. In certain devotional environments being pro-abortion appears to be the predominant opinion, to the point that “anti-abortion devotees” (almost a tautology) may feel the need to conceal their views to shield themselves from other devotees’ hostility. One additional problem: for devotees, accepting abortion as an acceptable option doesn’t exist in isolation. Their tendency to approve of killing fetuses also inevitably affects and erodes their faith in Srila Prabhupada and their allegiance to his message, Krishna’s message.

In a social media posting, a Vaisnavi in America wrote about her experience of speaking against abortion among her friends: “the reaction I was getting was not being made fun of, but anger and hostility and friendships were on the line. Specifically, I was told, when I noted what Srila Prabhupada has said, ‘Well, that’s YOUR choice to follow Srila Prabhupada.’ And I was like... ‘Ehhhh... don’t you follow Srila Prabhupada too?’ Cognitive dissonance. So weird.”

With a degree of disbelief, I had to acknowledge that we have a cultural plague on our hands. A pragmatic European friend wrote me: “What’s there to be surprised? Hardly anyone speaks about these things!” It’s a fact. When it’s the last time you heard about the ills of abortion in a *Bhagavatam* class or in a Sunday lecture? When the guardians of knowledge remain silent, devotees tend to imbibe the attitudes of the host culture; in this case, they tend to absorb and internalize the slogans of the abortionists.

Therefore the need for contents such as this book. Here I am not even trying for literary finesse or for tactful diplomacy (my friends know that “tactful diplomacy” is not my strong suit anyway). I am not even trying for a comprehensive coverage of the topic. I am not going to explain the various abortion procedures or describe the rare (I emphasize “rare”) circumstances in which an abortion could be morally legitimized (and those circumstances do not include pregnancy caused by rape). This book is not a complete treatise on the subject. I am aware of the shortcomings of this publication; if you are looking for a “Vaisnava Encyclopedia on Abortion” this is not it. For instance, here I am not going to address *all* the slogans spoken (or shouted) by pro-abortionists. I am not going to elaborate about the option of adoptions: In the US, at any time, there are about two millions household wishing to adopt a baby; at the same time, in the US every year there are more than 600,000 “legal” abortions (couldn’t they arrange to give their babies for adoption instead of killing them?) This book simply represents an urgent, perhaps shrill or even boorish expression of pain and discomfort, a scream in the dark, a not-so-humble but earnest appeal to sanity – which appears lost or covered in many of our brothers and sisters. Having said



that, besides my limited reflections, you will find words composed by ISKCON stalwarts, expressions of great depth, culture, and intelligence.

By the way, I am not suggesting public activism centered on abortion. As Srila Prabhupada writes, “**Certainly we are opposed to abortion, and we can advise that it is not good, but do not take an active part in this political agitation against abortion. We are not much concerned in that way, so do not waste time approaching politicians or affiliating with others on the basis of the anti abortion issue. We are Krsna Conscious and we are for Krsna Consciousness; that is our issue. Abortion is only a side issue.**” (Letter to Tusta Krsna Swami, 4 Feb 1977)



Obviously, this letter should not be used as an excuse for being cowardly and wishy-washy on the subject or for refraining from publicly condemning abortion, boldly and uncompromisingly. Srila Prabhupada didn't participate in anti-abortion marches and pro-life sit-ins but spoke openly and repeatedly against abortion in a variety of forums and to multiple audiences. He wasn't shy about his denunciation.

By the way, I don't consider myself pro-life or pro-choice; those are politically loaded, often misunderstood and misapplied labels utilized by ignorant people, many of whom can't even define what 'life' is. If you truly feel the need to label me, then I am “pro-*dharma*.” In this connection, I have started an organization, internal to Gaudiya-vaisnavism, called VARTMA – *Vaisnavas Against Rationalizing Tolerance to Murderous Abortions*. An awkward acronym, right? But isn't truly

awkward that we even need to talk about these things? VARTMA is now legally registered in 83 countries.¹ In Sanskrit *vartma* means the path, the way; something that many devotees appear to have lost - to the point of condoning intrauterine assassinations.



This book consists of:

1. Facebook postings, especially the series “Brainwashed by the Asuras,” in which I addressed the tacit acceptance by devotees of some dishonest and irrational memes spawned by abortionists.
2. Vintage *Back to Godhead* articles on abortion.
3. A lecture by Hridayanda Maharaja systematically, philosophically dismantling pro-abortion propaganda.

I trust my readers: If they wish to find more information on the subject, I am sure they can find so many useful references on the Internet. For example, the *American Life League*, a Catholic initiative, compiled a list of “Pro-Abortion Slogans and How to Handle Them.” It’s a substantial reference. I don’t guarantee that Gaudiya-vaisnavas would fully resonate with all the confutations presented, but if you are dealing with “pro-choice” debaters or, perhaps more importantly, if some of the abortionists’ slogans appeal to you, you may want to go through the list and see what arguments these “pro-lifers” provide:

<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/proabortion-slogans-and-how-to-handle-them-9553>

And on YouTube, of course, you can find plenty of stimulating and instructive videos, such as these two, in which a doctor formerly practicing abortions takes a stand against the practice:

“Ex-Abortion Doctor Tells the SHOCKING Truth About Abortion”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A16gzm9eaa8>

“A Former Abortion Doctor Speaks Out”

¹ Just kidding.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9l7lTMzEs8E>

(And often the comments are illuminating too.)

What else to say? I am experiencing a mixture of feelings in assembling this anthology: disappointment, disbelief, deep concern, even a sinister foreboding: is this unexpected phenomenon (Hare Krishna devotees condoning the murdering of the unborn) a sign of the End Times, the dreaded period of devastation enacted when arguments and reasons become insufficient to impede human degradation, and traumatic events on a global scale become necessary to restore a modicum of civilization?



"Death on the Pale Horse," painted by the American artist Benjamin West in 1796.

Brainwashed by the Asuras – Devotees Getting Bamboozled by the Dark Forces

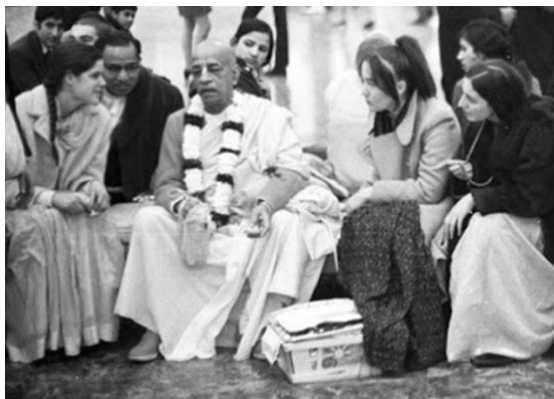
Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part One: “Men Cannot Tell Women What to Do”

Unfortunately, some devotees, due to bad company, become ensnared in the net of the illusory memes that abortionists peddle. These devotees assimilate and then regurgitate the asuras’ baseless claims.

For instance, a devotee recently publicly declared his belief that “it is obscene for any man to tell a woman what they should do with their body.” This is meaningless. It’s not a question of a man telling a woman; a woman telling a man; a man telling a man; or a woman telling a woman (what to do with their body). The principle is that one in knowledge should tell one in ignorance how to align with the laws of God (which include the laws of nature and the law of karma):

- A man in knowledge can and should educate an ignorant woman.
- A woman in knowledge can and should educate an ignorant man.
- A man in knowledge can and should educate an ignorant man.
- A woman in knowledge can and should educate an ignorant woman.

Gender is irrelevant: whoever has knowledge should enlighten the unenlightened to save them from a terrible pain in the future. So, Vaisnavas or Vaisnavis, should inform those considering killing the fetus about the consequences of their sin:



“As I have many times explained,” Srila Prabhupada says, “nowadays it is so much suffering that a child is born within the womb, and there is abortion, killed: ‘Kill him.’ But they do not understand the suffering, that one chance given that it will get a body and come out, and may be able to come to Kṛṣṇa consciousness . . . that

chance, he's being killed within the womb . . . But if . . . the mother does not kill, abortion, then it has got a chance to come out. Otherwise, there is no chance to come out even. He dies within the womb, again transferred to another womb, and again it is killed. So those who are too much sinful, those who are causing these abortions, they will get this sort of life. They will never see light. One womb killed; another womb, killed; another womb, killed; another womb, killed. This is so sinful, **this abortion.**” (Lecture on SB 2.3.9, Los Angeles, 26 May 1975),

So, what would be truly “obscene” is for enlightened men and women NOT to tell ignorant men and women about the dreadful consequences of killing their babies.

What’s truly “obscene” is that, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), every year in the world there are around 73 million induced abortions, or approximately 200,000 abortions per day.

Srila Prabhupada explains (lecture on Bg 2.12, London, 18 Aug 1973): “**The man who causes this abortion, he also being punished that, ‘You'll never see the light of this world. You'll simply have to live one womb to another, one womb to another. Go on.’** So nature's punishment is like that. But these foolish people, they do not know.”

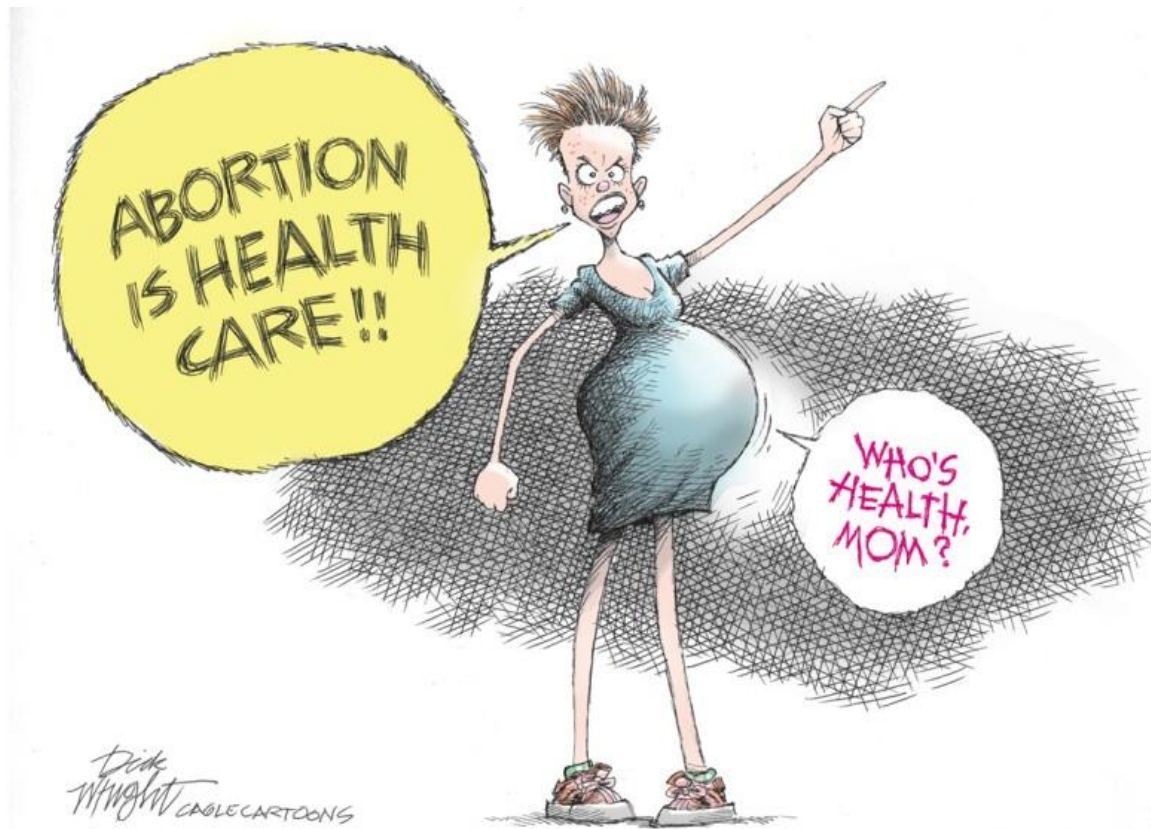


Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Two: “Abortion Is Health Care”



Another deceptive, fraudulent mantra by the abortionists: “abortion is health care”; with the special distinction that it’s the only “health care” in which someone surviving is considered a failure.

What's "health care" anyway? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, health care refers to: "efforts made to maintain, restore, or promote someone's physical, mental, or emotional well-being especially when performed by trained and licensed professionals."



A pregnancy is not a disease, a sickness, or an abnormal or pathological physical or psychological condition for the woman. In normal circumstances there is nothing to fix or "restore." It's the way humans (and other species) reproduce. Even more importantly, the child in the womb is not a malignant overgrowth, a wart, a cancer, or an anomalous, dangerous lump. It's a human being. And it's viciously dishonest and misleading to call the destruction of his or her developing body "health care."

Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Three: "It's My Body"

No, it's not. Sorry to burst your bubble. What does it make your body "yours"? Have you purchased it? Do you have a receipt? What are the principles, legal, ethical, or metaphysical, that makes someone the owner of something - anything?

How to determine if A owns B – be it inanimate matter or a living organism?

Philosophically speaking, the body belongs to God: **“A devotee knows very well that everything, even his body, belongs to the Supreme Lord.”** (SB 8.22.26, purport) Everything belongs to Krishna because all energies, in all shapes and forms, belong to Him.

Srila Prabhupada explains: **“In the śāstra, in the Vedic literature, it is said that everything belongs to God. Everything is manufactured by God.”** (Lecture on Bg 4.34-38, New York, 15 Aug 1966) We didn’t manufacture our body, so how can we claim ownership? The ingredients of the body do not belong to us. What misleading mental gymnastics produces the idea that we are the owners of the bodies we inhabit?

Since it’s not ours, we must use the body according to the laws of the Supreme Owner, otherwise we will be punished. Simply inhabiting a body doesn't make it "ours" (although, colloquially, we can refer to it as "my body" as, while traveling, we may say "my flight").

In the same lecture above, Srila Prabhupada says: **“Ignorance is no excuse. If in the law court you say, "My lord, I did not know that by stealing, one is punished," that, the magistrate or the judge, will not excuse you. The law, even this material law, is so strict, and you can imagine how much strict are stringent laws of the nature.”** (Lecture, Atlanta, 2 March 1975)

So, claiming the right to abort because “it’s my body” it’s just an empty slogan, and an unpardonable mistake. And even if, for argument’s sake, the body did factually belong to the mother, how can she claim that the body of the human being growing insider her, is part of her body? She can’t independently generate the fetus; she needs the input of another (male) body. So,



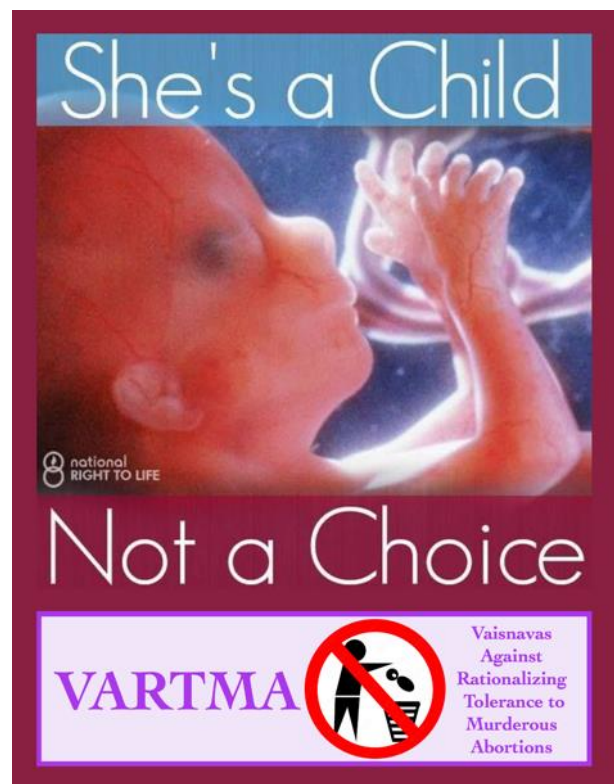
how can she claim the right to destroy something she didn’t autonomously create? How can she rightfully annihilate something that, even on the purely physical level, is a different body, with a different DNA, a different genetic makeup?

Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Four: “My Body, My Choice”

“Choice” is one of those expression that obscures and occults the bare facts with an acceptable-sounding word. It’s a baby, not a choice for you or me to make.

The slogan “My Body, My Choice,” if taken at face value, promotes violent anarchy, not “choice.” If freedom of choice superseded all other principles, supersedes all other freedoms, rapists could claim the freedom to choose rape; those who dislike homosexuals could claim the freedom to beat them up; those with certain political beliefs could choose to kill their opponents; and so on.

Where does the right of choice stop? When it infringes *dharma*. When it trespasses on other people’s rights. To avoid a total, sanguinary anarchy, all choices cannot be legal or protected as a right. The right of choice should be exercised *before* getting pregnant. After that it’s too late to claim the right to choose to kill.



Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Five: “Freedom to Choose”

The "freedom to choose" slogan is catchy. Who doesn't like “freedom”? But freedom – civilized freedom – has boundaries. In the United States, for instance, there are more than 250,000 laws, orders, and ordinances of every type, governing activities from parallel parking to murder, and every one of these restrictions limits “freedom.” We are not even free to park our car in a non-parking place without consequences; what to speak of dismembering a fetus. No human society deserving to be called “human” promotes or condones the right of private citizens to choose to kill another human being. When, in the name of “freedom to choose,” we deny



the embryo the freedom to live, the most basic freedom of all, we employ a dangerously dishonest language.

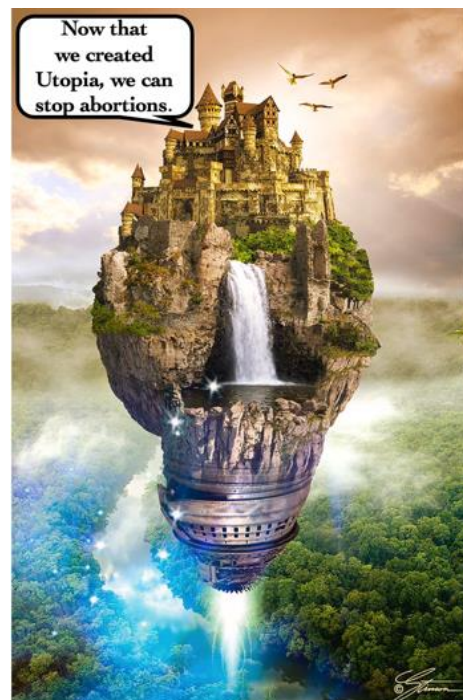
Since we are not free to choose the consequences of our actions, this slogan deludes and prepares the culprit for much, much, much less freedom in the future: “He dies within the womb, again transferred to another womb,” Srila Prabhupada warns, “and again it is killed. So those who are too much

sinful, those who are causing this abortion, they will get this sort of life. They will never see light. One womb, killed; another womb, killed; another womb, killed; another womb, killed.” (Lecture on SB 2.3.9, Los Angeles, 26 May 1975) Freedom should be used to create more freedom, not such a confined, constrained, excruciating existence.



Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Six: “Until Everything is Socially Ideal, Abortion Is OK”

A devotee asserted, basically, that we cannot condemn abortion until we work to create, “a just, pro-life society where everyone has education, healthcare, and housing.” In other words, until Utopia is fully manifest in the world, killing babies in the womb it’s OK. In fact, it’s just the opposite: the more we tolerate a culture of violence to the unborn, the more society will become beastly, chaotic, and self-destructive. Although noble sounding, the argument (“abortion is OK until there is the perfect social situation”) is just a rehash of the good, old paradigm in which sense gratification reign supreme, above all morality and virtue. “The baby



will be an obstacle to my comfort and a hurdle to my socio-economic advancement; and so I am justified to kill her.”

This devotee says that we cannot speak negatively of abortion until we actively “help create a pro-life society (where everyone would be assured of education, health-care, housing, etc.)” That’s irrational. Do we need to fix all the socio-economic shortcomings of humanity before we can denounce the murdering of the unborn? Give me a break. And give the fetuses a break. If you condone dismembering babies, by this or that pretext, you are contributing to creating a satanic society. Killing doesn’t bring prosperity and abundance but only pain and desperation. Forget about your lofty aims of education, healthcare, and housing; the human consortium will simply become more and more hellish, populated by homicidal brutes.

Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Seven: “The Fetus Is Not Really Alive”

Materialists may be totally ignorant about the facts of life, about the difference between *cit* and *acit*. They may believe the childish fable at a stage of development the *acit*, matter, becomes *cit*, a living, conscious person. But how a devotee can claim the extenuating factor of ignorance?

The Founder-*Acarya* says: “According to Vedic culture, destroying the undeveloped embryo of the soul in the womb is as sinful as killing a cow or a *brāhmaṇa*. In the embryo, the living entity is present in an undeveloped stage. The modern scientific theory that life is a combination of chemicals is nonsense . .



. . Here is a challenge from the Vedic literature. The crude, atheistic understanding that the living entity is a combination of matter belongs to the grossest ignorance.” (SB 9.9.31, purport)

A devotee should resist being victimized by that “grossest ignorance.” Devotees should know that when the *atma* is present, the

body is alive (which means that the embryo is alive from the moment of conception). Devotees should know (if they have read at least the second chapter of the *Gita*) that “alive” means that there is a living entity, a soul, an *atma*, inside the body. No one has the right to force the *atma* out of a developing human body. How can anyone argue that the embryo is not alive while it grows? Is anything growing, organically growing without being alive? How could cells multiply or how could organs become more defined and developed without life? If they found a minuscule bunch of multiplying cells on Mars, they would enthusiastically announce that they found life. How can they claim that there is no life in the womb till a certain number of weeks?

Followers of Srila Prabhupada should heed his teachings: **“Kali-yuga . . . is so degraded that a father and mother even kill their children in the womb on the plea of their scientific knowledge that within the womb the child has no life. Prestigious medical practitioners give this opinion, and therefore the father and mother of this day kill their children within the womb. How degraded human society has become!”** (SB 7.2.55, purport)

Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Eight: “But Studies Say...”

Recently a devotee quoted the Turnaway Study, which purported to show that “(a) most women who have abortions are glad they did, (b) there is no evidence of negative mental health effects following abortion, and (c) the only women really suffering are those who are being denied late-term abortions due to legal restrictions based on gestational age.”



But a paper published on the site of the (US) National Library of Medicine debunks such false conclusions by showing, for instance, “that over 68 percent of the women they sought to interview refused . . . that the remnant who did participate were atypical, there are no known benefits from abortion, their methods are misleadingly described, and their results are selectively reported.”² In the summary of the article “The Embrace of the Proabortion Turnaway Study -Wishful Thinking? or Willful

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6161227/>

Deceptions?” the author, David C. Reardon, PhD,, declares that “Widely publicized claims regarding the benefits of abortion for women have been discredited . . . a new exposé reveals that the authors have misled the public, using an unrepresentative, highly biased sample and misleading questions.” The article explains that the researchers of such studies were employed by the proabortion research group *Advancing New Standards in Reproductive Health* (ANSIRH).

The author says that “What is striking is that the major media outlets are so anxious to spread this proabortion propaganda that their science and health reporters have completely abandoned all objectivity . . . Clearly, the complicit medical journals and peer reviewers were so anxious to provide a platform for proabortion propaganda that they not only ignored the poor methodology and superficial analyses but also gave the authors free rein to publish exaggerated conclusions.”

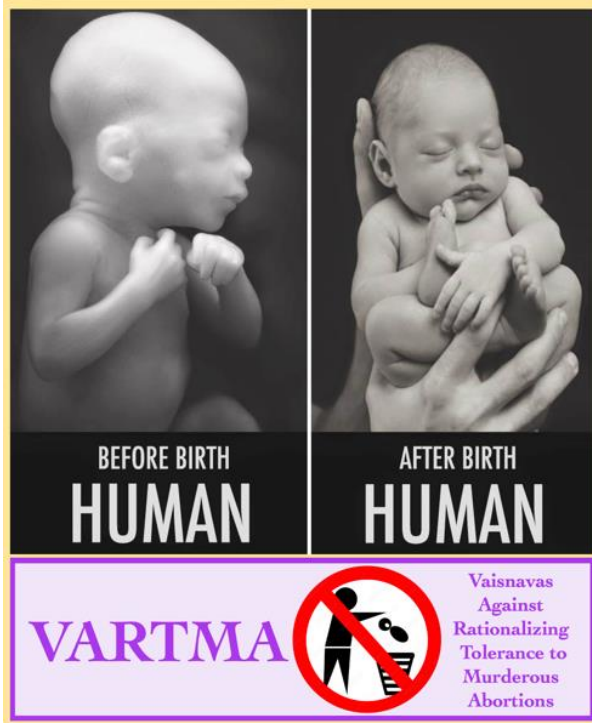
In other words: dear devotees, don’t get bamboozled by “scientific studies” commissioned and paid by pro-abortion agencies. Those studies are not meant to objectively illuminate the facts, but to promote the dishonest idea that killing babies in the womb is physically and mentally healthy for all involved (besides the babies).

Such studies craftily hide the mental agony many women experience after killing their babies, even decades later. After I made a few postings on social media, a woman in her sixties wrote me in private: “Keep going with your campaign against abortion; all those who support it as a right don’t know what they are talking about... I believed them in the past and I ruined my life, besides having assassinated my children: there is no day or night in which I don’t despair; no forgiveness absolves me.”³

Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Nine: “The Fetus Is Not Really Human”

What is he or she then? The parents are human; the DNA is human (a specific one, not the same as the mother’s); the developing form is human... What’s missing to be human? A mango is a mango, either when green or when fully ripened.

³ For examples of physical and psychological consequences for women who have abortions, from scientific, peer-reviewed studies, please refers to the lecture by Hridayananda Maharaja, included at the end of this book. These include, for instance, that women who had abortions are three times more likely to commit suicide than women who had no abortions.



On Facebook, a devotee stated: “there's a difference between a not-yet-born child and an actually born person.” I like how Madana-Gopala Prabhu addressed this idea: “I think this is the crux of the issue . . . The more we try to close our eyes to the fact that the entity in the womb is a living, growing human being, the more we will be inclined to justify killing him or her. We try to dehumanize him or her, and we try to make him or her something akin to a wart or extra ‘growth of cells’ that we can just remove with impunity. The moment we realize that this is another

living, growing human, we will see that the act of killing him or her (not ‘it’) is murder. And murder is not acceptable in human society. It is unconscionable and should be dealt with as any other killing.”

A stand-up comedian was musing on the topic with the analogy of a cake. He said that he had cooked a cake, put it in the oven, waiting it to be ready, and then someone comes, takes the cake, and throws it in the garbage, claiming that “it wasn’t yet a cake.” It was a cake, with all the ingredients that qualified it as a cake, even if it wasn’t fully baked. It was a cake that would have been fully ready (to be offered to Krishna) had it been left in peace in the over. Similarly, the fetus is fully human, even if it’s not yet ready to get a job and be financially self-sufficient.

A devotee asked: “When pregnant women do not feel capable of parenting, why should it be a sin to quickly terminate the pregnancy?” Because it’s a sin to kill a human being (of whatever size).

With the “logic” that condones such violence, you can basically kill any dependent you don’t feel ready to take care of. You could also say: “When people do not feel capable to care for their elderly parents, why should it be a sin to quickly eliminate them?” “When people do not feel capable to care for their quadriplegic children, why should it be a sin to quickly assassinate them?” And so on. The murderous rhetoric can easily perpetuate itself.

Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Ten: “No Uterus, No Opinion”



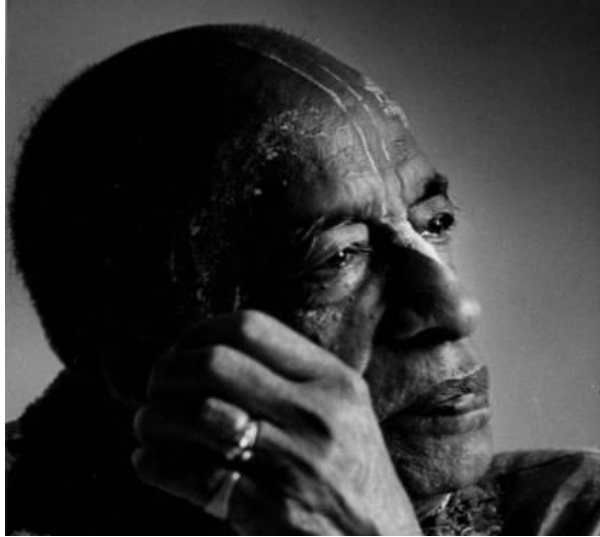
Abortionists argue: “How can a man (who has no uterus) understand what a woman goes through when deciding to abort her child? Therefore men shouldn’t be allowed to speak on the subject.” Sorry, but it doesn’t work that way. It would just be like saying that a female judge can’t preside a trial on rape because, “No Penis, No Opinion.”

“How can the woman judge have an opinion about the powerful hormonal drives, the overwhelming urges of the poor rapist without being a male herself? How can she, devoid of male genitalia and with a lower testosterone count, fully understand the masculine impulses to sexually assault his victim?”

No, the “logic” doesn’t hold. There are laws, both human and divine, on the permitted operational functions of the human body, regardless of one’s gender; just like there are laws, such as traffic rules, on operating a car; and they are universally valid, either you own a car or not. Rape is not permitted to men. They may not be punished by the state (in the US Less than 1% of rapes lead to felony convictions), but it doesn’t mean the act doesn’t generate loads of bad karma.

Killing the fetuses is not permitted to women (or to anyone else). It creates tons and tons of awful karma. Killing a fetus is a crime, not a mere “opinion.” Dear reader, either at present you have a uterus or not, you should listen to the Founder-*Acarya*, learning from this conversation held in Washington DC, on 3rd July 1976:

Prabhupāda: The law of nature is working very silently, subtle. But they do not know. *Ahaṅkāra-vimūḍhātmā kartāham iti manyate*. Rascal is so fool that he thinks that, "I can do everything, whatever I like." Similarly, killing of animal . . . This soul was to live in a particular type of body under the laws of nature, and you have checked, and he has to take again a similar body to fulfill the duration. Therefore



you have done criminality. I have got lease for live in this room for certain period. If prior to the expiry of the lease, if the landlord drives me away, that is illegal. He will be punished.

Rūpānuga: That is like abortion.

Prabhupāda: Everything is on that principle, that if you violating the laws of nature, therefore you are criminal, you have to be punished. You cannot do it. *Ahaṅkāra-vimūḍhātmā*.

Rūpānuga: Like if you are situated in your apartment and someone comes and forces you out of your apartment, that is like abortion.

Prabhupāda: Yes. That is abortion. By force you are destroying the shelter. Therefore you are criminal.

You can listen and learn, unless, of course, you believe Srila Prabhupada and the male *acaryas* can't speak on the subject because they didn't have a uterus...

Having a uterus doesn't authorize anyone to kill the inhabitant of that uterus. I may have a chair; but it doesn't allow me to kill whoever sits on that chair. It would be criminal (and monumentally stupid) if I try to validate my murder by telling someone who doesn't have a chair, "No Chair, No Opinion."

"No sense of human decency? Not a human body next life (or a human body killed in the womb)."

Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Eleven: “Reproductive Rights”

In his masterful essay “Abortion and the Language of Unconsciousness,”⁴ Ravindra Svarupa Prabhu explains how some people become expert at clouding and concealing sensitive issues and cruel behavior by using language that occults their true nature. The expression “reproductive rights” is a great example of that phenomenon. By speaking of “reproductive rights” the asuras attempt at arrogating

⁴ Included later in this book.



the right to kill babies in the womb, which is diametrically opposite to reproduction. If they were honest, they would speak of something like “reproduction-cessation rights” or “reproductive-disruption rights,” or “baby-assassination rights.” Portraying abortions as “reproductive rights” is like calling slaughterhouses “cow-care centers” or the murdering of *brahmanas* as “liberation-inducing procedures for *dvijas*.”

What an evil world, in which the forces of darkness disguise their true, deadly intentions with harmless-sounding expressions!

Brainwashed by the Asuras – Part Twelve: “But a Christian Pastor Said...”

On a Facebook group for devotees someone promoted a video meant to convince us that abortion is OK. I watched it and found it extremely unconvincing. In it a Christian pastor condoned the practice. He showed himself thoroughly ignorant of even the basics of spiritual knowledge, identifying with his body (and particularly the color of his body) and with his socio-political circumstances. As Srila Prabhupada puts it, talking about such fallen priests: **“They have no philosophy, and they violate everything what is stated there in Bible . . . They are sanctioning abortion.”**

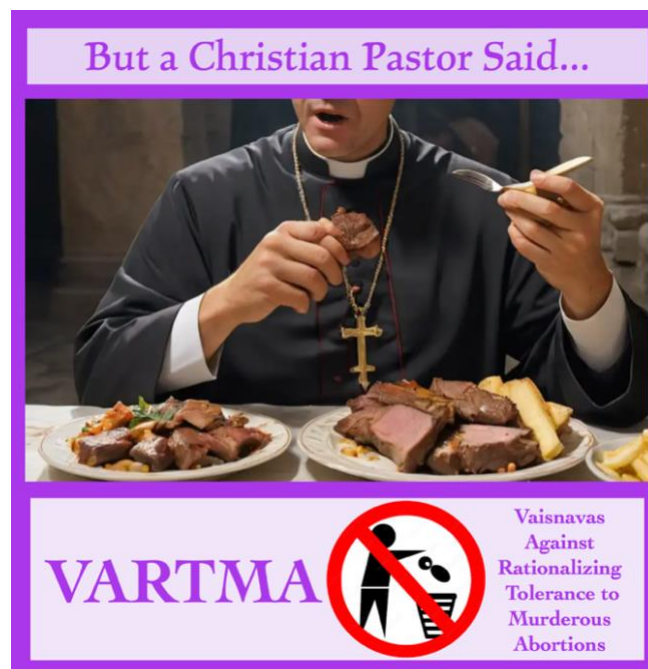
(Conversation, Nellore, 8 Jan 1976)



That pastor's choice of words also made me question his intellectual integrity. He said things like, "she found herself pregnant." But she hasn't "found herself pregnant"; she chose to have extramarital sex with a thug completely uninterested in assuming parental responsibilities, and pregnancy was the consequence of that choices. I consider that pastor to have no spiritual authority or religious integrity. What part of the biblical "thou shalt not kill" doesn't he understand? I consider him another glowworm unable to provide real light to dispel the darkness of the age.

"This is so sinful, this abortion." Srila Prabhupada commiserates, **"And the modern civilization and the priestly order, they are passing: 'If the mother selects. Otherwise, there is no objection, abortion.'** Such foolish world is going on. You see? There are so many subtle laws of nature. They do not know anything." (Lecture on SB 2.3.9, Los Angeles, 26 May 1972)

Devotees of Krishna promoting faulty, idiotic opinions from carnivorous priests as authoritative, show an abysmal judgement and a distorted epistemic orientation.



Miscellaneous Scary Exchanges

Srila Prabhupada on “Taking the Body as Lump of Matter”



During a morning walk in London, on 30 August 1973, Srila Prabhupada discusses abortion:

Prabhupāda: Now, at the present moment, they are trying to make the abortion as law. But these rascal cannot check their sex life. You see? Their philosophy is that you shall go on with sex life unrestrictedly, and when there is pregnancy, kill the child.

David Lawrence: Yes.

Prabhupāda: This is their rascals' philosophy. They have no idea that by training one can forget sex life. So if you forget sex life, where is the question of abortion? Where is the question of abortion? But they cannot do that. Therefore, it is said, *adānta-gobhir viśatām tamisram* [SB 7.5.30]. By nonrestricted sense enjoyment they are gradually going to the animal, lower grade of life. They cannot explain why there are so many varieties of life. They cannot explain. So this killer of baby within the womb, so the result will be that this man who is, I mean to say, indulging in

abortion, he'll be put into the womb, and somebody will kill him. And as many wombs or baby he has killed, he'll have to take so many lives and being killed.

David Lawrence: His karma.

Prabhupāda: So much so that it will be rather impossible for him for hundreds of years not to see the light. He'll remain in the womb, and being killed. Does not know the nature's law. One cannot violate the nature's law. You can violate the state law. Suppose you kill somebody, you can escape by trick. But you cannot escape nature's law. As many times you have killed, so many times you have to be killed within the womb. This is nature's law.

David Lawrence: I was very interested to talk to a nurse in one of the main London hospitals only last week, in fact, and she was saying that they're having an almost impossible time trying to man these abortion wards now, because all the nurses and doctors just don't want to do the work. In some cases, she was saying, that they take a baby from its mother's womb and, you know, it's sort of put onto a tray and thrown into a litter bin, and you can see it moving.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

David Lawrence: And they've had one or two cases at their hospital where they've gone out afterwards and they've seen babies moving. Terrible.

Prabhupāda: It has been seen in Calcutta also, in dustbin found out some child, dustbin.

David Lawrence: Terrible. You know, some are in such an advanced state of pregnancy that clearly life is a strong possibility.

Prabhupāda: Not advanced stage; life begins from the very beginning of sex. The sex... the living entity is very small. By nature's law, according to his karma, he's sent to the father's semina and that is injected, and immediately the two secretions emulsify, the man's and the woman's, and it forms a body just like a pea. That is the formation of body. Now that pea-like form develops gradually. Then first manifestation is the nine holes. Everything is there in the Vedic literature. So nine holes, we have got nine holes. (pointing) One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. In this way, gradually the senses develop, and by the time seven months, everything is complete, and the living entity's consciousness comes back. Prior to the formation of the body, the living entity remains unconscious just like in chloroform, anesthetic. Then he dreams, and then gradually consciousness... at that time he becomes very much upset to come out, come out. Then nature gives him kat! He comes out. That's all. This is the process of birth.

David Lawrence: Miracle.

Prabhupāda: What do they know? They do not know anything.

David Lawrence: No, no. I was absolutely amazed to read an article, I think it was...

Prabhupāda: This is Vedic knowledge. So you'll get everything perfect . . . We are speaking everything of the spiritual. Therefore, it is sometimes very difficult for the gross materialist. They are so dull-headed, they cannot understand.

David Lawrence: The British Association, which is... many people regard an irrelevant bunch of scientists, who meet once a year, one of the good speeches was in fact given on the question of the value of human life. And one of the points was made there by somebody who has had to talk to these girls who come in to have abortions, some cases their third and fourth abortion, and they're not married, of course. And was saying that many of the girls regard an abortion in the same way as they regard a shampoo for their hair.

Prabhupāda: Yes.

David Lawrence: "Oh, well, you know, hair's got to be washed. We wash hair. Womb's got to be cleaned out. We clean the womb out." Just like that.



Prabhupāda: And where is movement in the shampoo? That means there human being are simply being put into ignorance, animal kingdom. This is modern civilization.

David Lawrence: Yes, yes.

Prabhupāda: To keep people in ignorance, in darkness, is *ajānata*. *Ajānata*. The Sanskrit word is *ajānata*. *Lokasya ajānata*. *Ajānata* means to keep in darkness. They do not know anything about the importance of life. *Ajānata*. *Yayā sammohito jīva ātmānaṁ tri-guṇātmakam* [SB 1.7.5]. By this *ajānata* principle a man considers that



this, "I am this matter." They are all doing all these things because they have no spiritual understanding.

David Lawrence: That's right.

Prabhupāda: Yes. Taking the body as lump of matter. That's all. To break a stone and to kill the body of a child is the same thing. They think like that.

Arjuna the Abortionist?

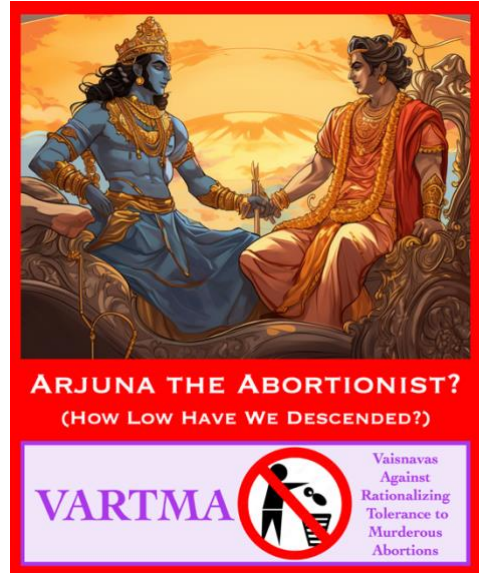
Two devotees (one of them even initiated by Srila Prabhupada) recently quoted a version of the following verse of the *Bhagavad-gita* to support abortion: "When there is an increase of unwanted population, a hellish situation is created both for the family and for those who destroy the family tradition." (Bg 1.41)

They are basically saying that abortion is fine because those children from unplanned pregnancies, if allowed to live, will create chaos. It's better to kill them in the womb, thus preventing them from creating trouble. I can hardly recall another verse of the *Gita* so blatantly misquoted, misinterpreted, and misused.

Actually, Arjuna is concerned about the possible degradation of women, and for a woman to kill her baby can be considered the pinnacle of moral degradation. How could Arjuna be supporting or implying that while lamenting about the possible degradation of women?

Arjuna is not promoting the slaughter of fetuses resulting from unwanted pregnancies. First, there isn't any mention of "unwanted population" in the Sanskrit. The expression used is *varna-sankara*, which means "of mixed social categories." Srila Prabhupada gives an "extended translation" of that concept; that is, children of mixed-*varnas* (especially from *pratiloma* unions, in which the men are culturally inferior to the women) tend to create disorder as their personalities are not organically defined or healthily oriented. How can anyone (what to speak of Arjuna) suggest to prevent degradation by promoting the most degraded act of killing babies?

Arjuna is concerned about *preventing* unwanted pregnancies, he is not suggesting terminating them, which a civilized person (what to speak of an enlightened Vedic *ksatriya*) would never consider as an option. Therefore, hijacking, and misrepresenting Arjuna's words to promote abortion is absurd and indefensible.



The act of abortion is not conducive to a better, saner human society; it provokes a hellish abomination for the human consortium. Abortionists are actually “those who destroy the family tradition,” by physically eliminating members of the family in the womb and promoting the accumulation of mountains of bad karma. Abortionists are dismantling any trace of human civilization.

One devotee wrote: “When pregnant women do not feel capable of parenting, why should it be a sin to quickly terminate the pregnancy?” This type of questions reveals the severe level of bewilderment and obfuscation of the questioner. The answer is: because it’s a sin to kill a human being, at every stage of development, inside or outside the womb. Those who “do not feel capable of parenting,” should avoid causing pregnancies. Once the pregnancy is operational, one should take responsibility of the life in the womb. Anything else is below barbarian.

That devotee continued, misquoting the *Gita*: “As Arjuna said, ‘An increase of unwanted population certainly causes hellish life’” In reality, it’s exactly the opposite: promoting and practicing abortion are symptomatic of an already hellish situation. Even before coming to the West Srila Prabhupada spoke about the **“sinful acts of killing a living entity in the embryo. Such sinful acts have their reactions bringing in unwanted population called the Varna Sankara.”** (Back to Godhead magazine, vol. 3, part 7, 1956) In other words, abortion provokes bringing about a mixed-up, mentally and morally bankrupt population. In the same article Srila Prabhupada explains that **“The population must be checked by voluntary method.”** Not by terminating embryos in the womb.

Later Srila Prabhupada says: **“Now the *varṇa-saṅkara* has come to such an extent that they are killing child, and that is legal. They have come down to such an extreme position.”** (Conversation, Mexico City, 12 Feb 1975) Only someone (even if in the garb of a devotee) with a mixed-up, confused, and disoriented mentality (typical of *varṇa-saṅkaras*) supports killing children in the womb.

(I apologize for the ALL CAPS, but it seems that sometimes I need to shout over the cacophony of bewilderment) ARJUNA WISHES TO ***PREVENT*** ILLEGITIMATE PREGNANCIES; HE IS NOT SUGGESTING TERMINATING THEM.

A Painfully Revealing Interaction

I am reporting and commenting on a personal written exchange between me and a devotee who considers my anti-abortion stance as an “extreme conservative view.” He writes: “Obviously it's painful for women to abort their offspring, but with all that pain they can't be coerced to make such a decision one way or another.”

That's the whole point and aim; we need to create a culture (AT THE VERY LEAST AMONG VAISNAVAS), a level of awareness (at least of karmic reactions, if nothing else) so that the “decision” to kill the baby is not even contemplated as an option.

He continues: “In modern times where such procedures are available and will be going on illegally if restricted, women will risk their health if had to do it in non-regulated clinics.”

My reply: it's like saying, “Well, some people will rob banks anyway, so let's help them doing it safely. Perhaps we can ban having armed guards on the premises. Why making it harder for the criminals since they will try to rob banks anyway? After all, you know, it's a hard decision to rob a bank; why making it more difficult by criminalizing it?” Vaisnavas should be against armed robberies and should be against pregnancy terminations. The fact that someone will do it anyway, doesn't mean we have to condone or support it.

That Prabhu goes on: “The main thing for me is to let women exercise their own conscience and make their painful decisions by themselves.” But that's the point and the central issue: a woman who kills her baby doesn't have a developed, civilized, fully human “conscience.” How can they “exercise their own conscience” if they are totally ignorant of the facts of life; totally ignorant of the karmic reactions; totally brainwashed by “pro-choice” propaganda? The proposition “let women exercise their own conscience” is faulty because one cannot properly exercise one's conscience without possessing knowledge.





It's like saying, "Let the bank robbers exercise their conscience and make the 'painful decision' to assault the bank or not." Is that a fair, sane suggestion? In fact, the analogy of the bank robbers is not fully accurate. It's too soft. In the US only in 30% of all bank robberies someone dies, while in pregnancy terminations virtually all babies get killed. In Canada, for instance, there is an average rate of survival of 0.21%; that is, instead of terminating the pregnancy, the abortion procedure results in the live birth of the infant, that means that 99.79% of the babies are "successfully" assassinated (9,979 times over 10,000 attempts). But that percentage is a conservative estimate, because in many cases of live birth there is a second abortion attempt.

The devotee continues: "I believe in education and not coercion, and that we need to respect and trust women in making their hard decisions in their own lives."



As a minimum, let me point out two things:

1. The expression “in their own lives” is misleading, because we are talking also about the life of someone else, not just the life of the expecting mother. The lives of the babies are not the mothers’ “own lives.” They are separate lives. Unless we understand this, the dialogue is irredeemably falsified and gridlocked.
2. There shouldn’t be “coercion” for the mothers, but it’s perfectly fine to impose “coercion” on babies by carving them into chunks and then extracting them piece by piece? Is that a fair conclusion for someone who doesn’t believe in “coercion”?

The Prabhu concludes: “Just my personal opinion here, please don't kill me for expressing it.”

I perceive an unnecessary degree of “cuteness”; all I am doing is saying not to kill anybody, and he pleads me not to kill him... More importantly, Vaisnavas are supposed to promote the opinion of the *acaryas*, not their own “personal opinion,” especially an opinion disfigured by disinformation, by the views of sinful activists, and by the marketing drum of the abortion industry (whose revenue for 2023, just in the US, amounted to more than 4 billion dollars). Since he mentioned “personal opinion,” let me conclude with Srila Prabhupada’s “personal opinion” (in truth, the voice of the *sampradaya*): “**abortion is considered equivalent to murder.**” (Letter to Pope Paul VI, 3 Aug 1968)

Do we Really Doubt if Children and Cows Should or Shouldn't Be Protected?

The devotee replied: “The analogy of bank robbers is a big stretch. I'd suggest the analogy to be of someone robbing their own wallet.”

The function of an analogy is to compare something unknown with something known, to help emphasize similarities. We all have some idea of what bank robberies are; but in this case the idea of people robbing themselves doesn’t make any sense. First, you cannot really rob yourself of your own wallet; second, by taking one’s own wallet nobody gets hurt; no life is terminated. Abortion is completely different, and how is a growing baby comparable to an inert wallet? In any case, killing babies or robbing banks shouldn’t be just left to be decisions to the potential abortionists

and the potential robbers. Both should be legislated as crimes (because they are both crimes according to cosmic justice).

The Prabhu continued: “While according to your religious beliefs abortion is a first-degree murder, others see it as a second or third degree and some don't see it as a murder at all.”

Yes, opinions on abortion are ultimately based on metaphysical stances: what is life? What is death? Is the child in the womb a human being? When does a fetus become a person? What kind of consequences are there for destroying a fetus? Etc.

At the same time, don't Vaisnavas accept the Vedic revelation and of the *acaryas* as much more than “religious beliefs,” but as factual, valid knowledge? Don't Vaisnavas accept *sastra* as the highest *pramana*, the solidest evidence about the nature of reality? The epistemic relativism contained in the expression “your religious beliefs” is another serious symptom of decadence and confusion.

The devotee continued: “To explain the difference between coercion and education, I'd suggest the analogy of meat eating. Should people eating cow flesh be punished by law, and should all slaughterhouses be shut down and prohibited?”

What a question... Yes, to both, of course. Cow killing should be illegal and opening slaughterhouses should be prohibited. Does this devotee doubt even these plain ideas? Low-class people can eat the flesh of naturally deceased cows, or, if they really want, the flesh of lower animals: “Those who are meat-eaters, they can eat the hogs and dogs, they can eat.” Srila Prabhupada says, “The Vedic injunction is not prohibiting them . . . actually, a human being does not require to eat meat. He has got many other substitutes. But still if he wants to eat, let him eat the less important animals.” (Conversation, Geneva, 31 May 1974)





In a civilized society, *adharma*, sin, violence should be discouraged and minimized. One way of doing that is imposing legal restrictions and commensurate punishments.



Then the Prabhu asked: “Or should vegetarians continue to educate the public about the benefits of a vegetarian diet?” It’s not an either/or question. Education and legislation are not mutually exclusive. Education should go on about the benefits of being vegetarian and offering everything to Krishna, and at the same time cow killing should be criminalized. Isn’t indiscriminately killing cats and dogs already legally banned in most countries?

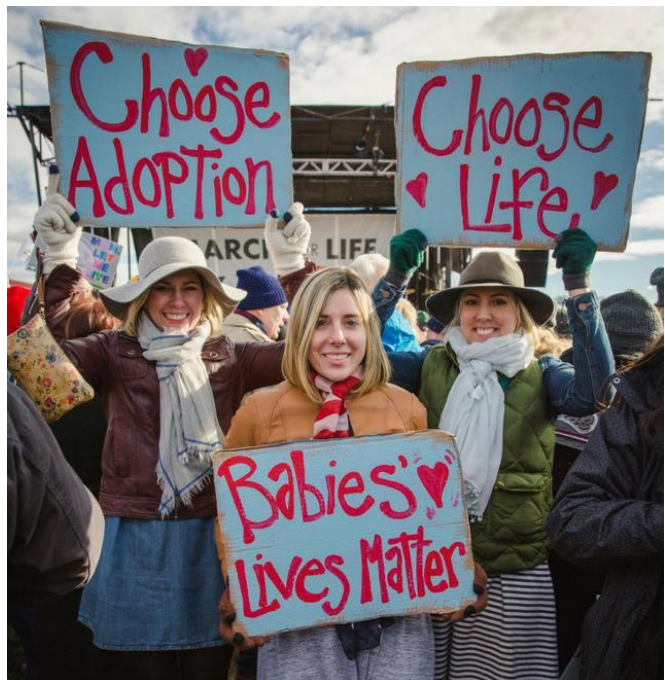
The Prabhu concluded: “While according to your religious beliefs lacto-vegetarian is the only way to go, others hold varying



beliefs. The material world was created in a way that respects our free will and allows us to choose and find out the consequences.”

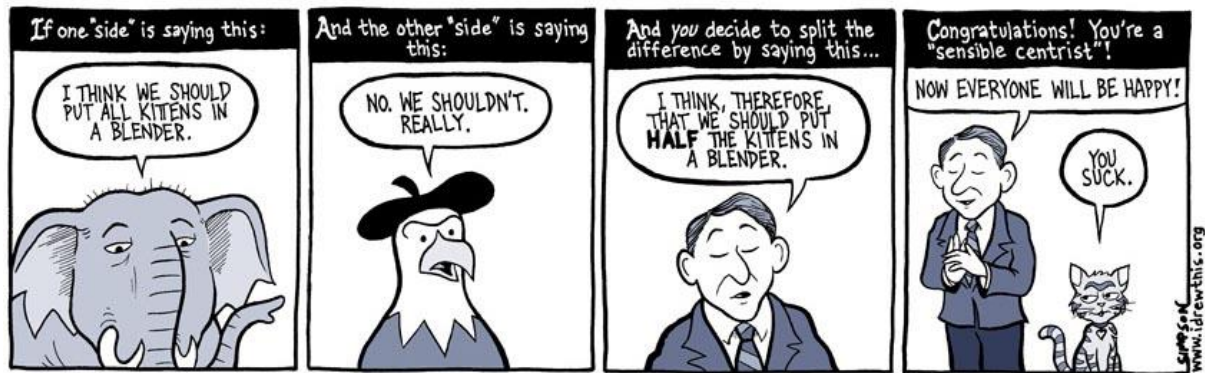
That’s not true. In all countries there are laws that regulate and restrict the behavior of people to minimize violence against others. No country on Earth says, “OK citizens, you are free to do as you like, and material nature will punish or reward you; we won’t have any laws; nothing will be

punishable by the state. We are leaving everything to karma.” No, every state, according to their metaphysical values, their prominent beliefs on what’s tolerable or intolerable, makes laws and imposes corresponding penalties on those who break them. Higher knowledge (and I am talking about knowledge, not subjective “religious beliefs”) will produce better laws. Sinful, vicious acts such as killing fetuses and killing cows should be banned, AND education should go on simultaneously.



The Pro-abortion Devotees’ “Middle Ground” Fallacy

I have heard, in different forms, the denunciations of devotees who believe abortion is OK: “You are extreme.” “You should adopt a more moderate stance.” “Your views are fanatical and extremist.” Condemning being against abortion as an extremist view reveals an unprincipled or intellectually compromised interlocutor. If I am wrong, show it to me by *guru*, *sadhu*, and *sastra* evidence, not by appealing to the “middle ground” logical fallacy.



This fallacy is also known as *Argumentum ad Temperantiam* (*temperantiam* means temperance), the Golden Mean Fallacy, the Gray Area Fallacy, the Fallacy of Moderation, and Splitting the Difference. It assumes that a compromise between two extreme conflicting points is always true. This fallacy tempts us to fall into the trap of assuming that compromise is always desirable; but compromise, in and of itself, has nothing to do with validity. This approach denies the possibility that one of the extremes could be perfectly true, right, and appropriate.

A classic example is that of arithmetic: someone says, “Three plus three is equal to six.” Another person says, “No, three plus three is equal to ten.” A third person concludes, “Let’s be balanced and reject both extreme views; let’s agree with a middle way: three plus three is equal to eight.” Actually one of the two “extremes” (six) is right, even if it’s at one end of the spectrum between six and ten.

Similarly, in the issue of abortion, appealing to a “middle ground” can be as wrong as suggesting that the right answer is eight. Someone makes that mistake by saying something like: “Promoting abortion with absolutely no boundaries (number of weeks of pregnancy, etc.) is wrong; but condemning all sorts of abortions is also wrong; let’s be moderate, let’s be mature and accept that if a woman feels burdened by the pregnancy and by the prospect to raise the child, then it’s OK to dismember the fetus within the first 20 weeks.” This, I propose, it’s a meaningless, insane form of “middle ground.”

The other big problem with the fallacy is that all positions can be presented as the “middle ground” by arbitrarily moving the markers and redefine what’s extreme and what is not: “I think it’s extreme to say that women should never kill their babies; but I also think it’s extreme to say that women should be allowed to freely

terminate every pregnancy; a wise, balanced middle ground would be to legally permit each woman to dismember no more than five fetuses.”

Please, if you find mistakes in my reasoning and arguments, educate me, I remain open to learn; but appeals to middle ground shall be dismissed as insubstantial.



Vintage Back to Godhead Articles



Although written decades ago, these pieces are still relevant today, especially considering the present bewilderment within our communities.

We include the original artworks.

The authors wrote these articles after 1973, the year in which the US Supreme Court, in *Roe v. Wade*, affirmed the legality of a woman's right to have an abortion under the fourteenth amendment to the Constitution. Later, in 2022, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the US Supreme Court reversed *Roe v. Wade*, concluding that the choice to abort is *not* a constitutional right. In the US, abortion legislation is now therefore defined on a state-by-state basis.

As we prepare these pages, some states are feverishly modifying their laws, making access to abortion easier or harder. The official constitutional interpretation may have changed, but the underlying jurisprudential, moral, scientific, and metaphysical debates are as actual and alive as ever.

Abortion and the Language of Unconsciousness - by Ravindra Svarupa Dasa

In *Politics and the English Language*, an essay published in 1946, George Orwell showed how political writing and speech, which, he said, are “largely the defense of the indefensible,” corrupt language through wordiness, hackneyed expressions, vagueness, ambiguity, and euphemisms. The intent of the writer or speaker, Orwell said, is to conceal what he is actually saying—even from himself. For example: “Defense-less villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers. People are imprisoned for years without

trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps: this is called elimination of unreliable elements. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them.”

Orwell’s essay has become famous, but that did not inhibit American officials from using these very euphemisms during the Vietnam War.

More recently, the American public was given a dramatization of Orwell’s lesson in the widely-viewed television show Holocaust. A leading character in the story was one Eric Dorf, a bright young lawyer who rose to prominence in the S.S. chiefly because of his talent for manufacturing euphemisms. Dorf named the ghettos in which Jews were confined “Autonomous Jewish Territories”; the removal of Jews to death camps he called “resettlement” and “relocation”; the murder of Jews en masse he named “special handling.” Thus Dorf provided the S.S. a way to talk about their activities without making themselves and their listeners unduly conscious of what they were actually doing.

“Political language,” wrote Orwell, “is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable.” But neither Orwell’s essay nor the popularization of his lesson in Holocaust seems to have deterred people from using political language. It continues to fulfill a great need. One particular contemporary American instance is very revealing.



The political issue here is abortion. But abortion is an ugly and brutal word because what it names is ugly and brutal. A billboard advertising ABORTION in yard-high letters would shock our sensibilities. But we are not made needlessly conscious of the service offered when we read PREGNANCY TERMINATION. Here is political language at its finest. A clumsy cluster of polysyllables is substituted for a

short, direct word. The new expression slyly sidesteps the fact that a life is ended by

suggesting only that a pregnancy is. The phrase, to use Orwell's words, "falls upon the facts like soft snow, blurring the outlines and covering up all the details."

Moreover, when the mother comes to have her pregnancy terminated—that is, her fetus aborted—she never hears that anything so crude and offensive as the killing of a child will take place. Rather, she hears that the tissue will be removed, an expression that puts the operation comfortably on the level of the cutting out of an ingrown toenail or the lifting off of a wart.

Obviously some anonymous Eric Dorf has been diligently at work, doing a necessary service.

The very fact that proabortionists take refuge in political language is itself a strong argument against their case. There would be no need for euphemism if there were nothing to hide. The transparency of the deception only shows how desperate people are to become unconscious of their acts. Although at heart they recognize the self-deception, they carry on the ruse, for the clarity of consciousness would be unbearable.

Orwell saw that when language is corrupted, thought is corrupted, consciousness is corrupted—people are corrupted. To improve language is to improve human beings. Yet the appearance of political language among abortion advocates especially shows how difficult the problem is. For most proabortionists are liberals and, as such, claim to be sensitive to the kind of language needed for the totalitarian bureaucratization of evil. They, above all, listened to Orwell. Yet they are sadly susceptible to the same corruption. Pregnancy termination and removal of the tissue must be added to pacification, elimination of unreliable elements, and special handling as part of the particular contribution of our time to the corruption of human life.

I suspect, however, that an advocate of abortion would charge that my case is question-begging and assert that I must deal with tissues more substantive than language. Pregnancy termination and removal of the tissue, the proabortionist might say, are somewhat euphemistic, but they are more than that. The mother seeking an abortion has made a difficult choice, and much of her difficulty is due to her conditioning by a specious outlook that regards the fetus as a person and its destruction as homicide. This view is based on the unscientific idea that the fetus is a person by virtue of a "soul." Calling the fetus "tissue" only emphasizes that tissue

is all the fetus, in fact, is, and tissue is all that is destroyed. My argument presupposes that the fetus is a person, but that assumption is precisely what is in question.

Here, then, abortion is justified by a view of the world that (appealing to the authority of science) sees everything in existence, human beings included, as arising out of ultimately accidental combinations of blind and lifeless matter. Everyone is familiar with this position. As a justification for abortion, however, it has problems. According to this view, a fertilized ovum becomes a human being through a gradually increasing complexity in organic structure. Yet the point in this process at which the entity is complex enough to be called “human” is acknowledged to be arbitrary. Any number of different criteria can be picked for any number of reasons. Granting the principle that reduces human beings to complexities of matter, a strong case has been made that a child becomes human only well after birth—for example, when it has developed the neural connections associated with language. The point is that we decide, arbitrarily, whether or not we want to recognize some being as human. After all, the same reductionistic philosophy that decrees a fetus to be tissue also decrees you and I to be tissue. We are, all of us, nothing but tissue. But because we have chosen to kill the unborn child, we now make a point of calling it “tissue.” If we chose to kill others, we could classify them as “tissue” well. Are the mentally retarded “tissue?” Are the old and infirm “tissue”? Of course they are, and if we decide that it is too expensive and bothersome to take care them (or, in political language, that it involves “too high a social cost”), we will start calling them “tissue” and beg “terminating” them.

We are back to language. It makes easier for us to kill people if we don’t think of them as such. By word magic, we make them less than human: “scum,” “gooks,” “pigs,” and, in this case, “tissue.” That we have a philosophical justification for this procedure only makes it worse. Certain Eric Dorf’s language was based on the philosophy that Jews were not human and killing them not murder—but only “special handling,” like disposing of unwanted warehouse stock.

The linguistic issue and the substantial issue really come to the same point: depersonalization. Historically, depersonalization began with nature. Before nature could be conquered and exploited, it had to be depersonalized. As long as nature was thought to be controlled by person forces, one had to placate and satisfy the through propitiation and sacrifice. The powers were stronger than men and easily offended; one had to be careful and subservient; at best, control was indirect and precarious. But the mechanistic view the world as nothing but structures of dead

matter shoved about by unvarying impersonal forces made possible a technology for the direct human domination and control over nature.

This depersonalization, however, has already begun with Christianity, which banished the pagan gods and the myriad local spirits of woods and streams and mountains. Christianity recognized a single transcendent Deity entirely separate from His creation. Thus nature lost both its personal and its sacred character. In fact, with Christianity, the nonhuman part of creation became something of an anomaly; it had no significance in itself but was merely the backdrop for the central human drama of redemption. Humans alone had immortal souls, and all the excess of furious and intricate life that otherwise fills the world was an unintelligible addendum, meaningful only when it serve some human end. The world, thus depersonalized and desacralized, could now be regarded entirely as a thing, as a object for detached study and the mechanical manipulations of an impersonal, science.

There was some success in this endeavour, and naturally the question arose, Why should humanity itself be unique, categorically different from the rest of creation? If laws are universal and nature a unity, why shouldn't human beings be subject to the same categories of explanation that cover everything else? And as for God—God was already seen as essentially disconnected from the creation, so transcendent that we can properly form no positive idea of Him at all, and the vision of the world as a field of impersonal forces operating according to unchangeable laws made Him even more remote and finally irrelevant. God went into eclipse, and humanity was no longer unique.

That human life itself is now becoming more and more impersonal and mechanistic is simply-the latest stage in this historical development. We depersonalized nature; we depersonalized God; now we are busy depersonalizing ourselves. The domination of the mechanistic and reductionistic view of the world in our culture insures that the process will continue. Although people continually complain about being treated as things, these same people fully accept a view of the world that makes them into things. This is why the nightmare vision of society turned into a numbered robotized collective enslaved to mindless routines by an inscrutable bureaucracy or a remote, omnipotent leader haunts us with such persistent force. It is genuinely prophetic, for the future is already in us. We have accepted all the conditions for it, and now we fearfully await the manifestation.

The establishment of abortion brings the nightmare closer to reality. We may fear the growing depersonalization of life, but to justify the killing of an unborn child because it is nothing but tissue is to advance that depersonalization one terrifying step further.

Depersonalization means the deadening of life, the transformation of what is vital into something inert and mechanical. It signifies a loss of consciousness. This is important to realize, because it brings to light the fact that no one can depersonalize others without at the same time depersonalizing himself. The people who make an unborn child less than human thereby make themselves less than human, and they unwittingly reveal this by adopting language that is designed to foster unconsciousness. Orwell himself particularly observed that a speaker of political language is more like a “dummy” than a live human being: he “has gone some distance toward turning himself into a machine” and entered into “a reduced state of consciousness.” Reduction of consciousness precisely defines the regression of the human race.

A progressive human life is a continuing struggle against unconsciousness. Unconsciousness characterizes the dead, the inert to be fully alive is to be fully conscious. The enhancement of consciousness is the triumph of life over death, of spirit over matter. Depersonalization, unconsciousness, threatens everything of value human life can achieve. Yet we have for some time already been reduced in consciousness. The depersonalization of God and of nature were significant steps toward our own depersonalization; seeing God and nature as insentient is a function of our own reduced sentience.

Before we can do anything about depersonalization, we have to understand its cause. Depersonalization is necessary for us to dominate and enjoy others. When I, a conscious subject, recognize another as a conscious subject like myself, the kinds of relationships we have are what we call personal, based on a mutual respect for each other’s subjectivity. If, however, I set out to dominate another in order to use that person as an instrument for my own enjoyment, then I change him or her into an object, a mere means. The person becomes merely a tool to be manipulated and controlled. I do not consider that the other has significance for himself, and thus I lose the consciousness of the other as a person. For example, a factory owner interested only in profit will not really consider his employees humans as such; they are merely tools of labor, factors in an economic equation, usable commodities. In a similar way, women are exploited by men when men regard them only as objects

for enjoyment, mere instruments. The exploiter of workers or of women depersonalizes them, but in the process he has depersonalized himself, for he has become unconscious. Thus incapacitated, he is unable to experience personal relations and has emptied his own life of significance.

Thus, the drive to satisfy human appetites causes depersonalization and unconsciousness. All human relations in which this drive is a factor are to that extent corrupted, and the would-be enjoyer, his consciousness diminished, becomes deprived of the only real source of happiness: genuinely personal relations, which alone enhance consciousness and life itself.

For this reason, we must accept the hard but unavoidable conclusion that depersonalization and unconsciousness can be eliminated only by eliminating the desire to enjoy others. Since this desire is so deeply rooted, its eradication would seem to require a very fundamental kind of human reformation. This may seem radical but it should not be surprising. We have seen how the steady encroachment of depersonalization and unconsciousness into our lives—exemplified in our acceptance of abortion—is a function of a long-established, fundamental view of the world. Constitutional amendments, legislation, and similar superficial measures are not going to change that. Rather, the impersonal, mechanistic view of the world must be abandoned. But that will happen only if we can become free from the desire to make others instruments to our own enjoyment.

The only vision of the world I know of that is fully personal, that sees both God and all fellow living beings as irreducibly conscious and personal, is taught by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gīta* and elaborated further in the *Srīmad-Bhāgavatam*. According to this view, not just humans—and human fetuses—are souls: all living beings are souls: The soul is a minute but eternal spiritual entity with consciousness as its essential characteristic. Souls animate bodies of matter; they are the living force. Thus, there is no living creature without significance for itself. A person who has become fully conscious by following the directions of the *Bhagavad-gīta* sees this, and he will not exploit any creature for his enjoyment. His love is unrestricted and unimpeded.

A conscious person will not kill even animals (much less very young humans) for his pleasure or convenience. Certainly the unconsciousness and brutality that allows us to erect factories of death for animals lay the groundwork for our treating humans in the same way.

The idea that life is the property of souls is derisively referred to by mechanistic thinkers as “vitalism” or “animism.” They assert that there is no evidence for souls. Yet it has been a singular failure of materialistic science to demonstrate how out of a world composed of nothing but matter something arises that experiences matter. Moreover, the ability to apprehend souls is not possessed by everyone—it is not, in particular, possessed by those who have become unconscious because of their exploitative mentality. A society whose ideal is to reduce everything to exploitable objects will not produce many people conscious enough to see what is living and personal. That society will advance only into the increasing obscurity of unconsciousness and impersonality.

Yet it is possible to counteract this corruption of our experience, this brutalization of consciousness that annihilates our ability to enter into personal relations and condemns us to an absurd, insipid existence in a lifeless, soulless world. We do not have to be victims of the politics of unconsciousness.

According to the *Bhagavad-gita*, the desire to control and enjoy others is not natural in us. Desire itself is the symptom of life; desire is natural, but in its original state that desire is manifest as unrestricted love for God, Krsna, the Supreme Person—and through Him, for all other persons that come from Him and are part of Him. Only in our unconscious state have we forgotten the real object of our love and allowed our love to be transformed into lust, into the desire to exploit others for our selfish purposes. This transformation can be reversed.

The practical method that reconverts lust into love, unconsciousness into consciousness, is called bhakti-yoga. This yoga redirects the use of the senses from dominating and enjoying others to serving Krsna, who is the natural master of the senses. In the course of that devotional service, all the potentialities of the soul become manifest. We experience the true pleasure of full consciousness, of life without limitation or qualification. This advancement into complete consciousness and unimpeded personal relations is aim of human life.

Even though consciousness is a live option, the future for human society still looks bleak. The acceptance of abortion is a great victory for the politics of unconsciousness. Still, unlike the millions innocent children it has ruthlessly destroyed, we do not have to become its hapless victims. We do not have to succumb this monstrous negation of life. We still accept the invitation of Krsna and rejoin the world of the living.

Abortion and the Hypocritic Oath - by Jagajivana Dasa

Jun 1, 1979

My sister was just back from Europe and just hearing for the first time about a Southern California obstetrician named William Waddill. I told her that after an unsuccessful abortion, Dr. Waddill had allegedly strangled the baby.

"What? Oh, how *awful*?"

"The amazing thing," I told my sister, "was that *Newsweek* asked, 'Was it abortion or murder?' As if there were any difference.

"Well, that's a matter of opinion."

"No, it's not," I said, a bit stunned at the way the media can persuade.

In the practical everyday sense, of course, abortion surely is a matter of opinion. And the powers that be surely know how to sidestep and manipulate that opinion. With public opinion at its most sensitive, during the era of the Nuremburg trials, members of the United Nations' World Health Organization vowed in their Geneva Declaration, "I will maintain the utmost respect for human life from the time of conception; even under threat I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity." And in 1959, in their declaration of human rights, the U.N. gave us this assuring message: "The child, by reason of its physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection before as well as after birth."

Yet despite these avowals, in 1948 Julian Huxley, the first Director General of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) had already taken a different kind of oath in *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy*:

. . . even though it is quite true that any radical eugenic policy will be for many years politically and psychologically impossible, it will be important for UNESCO to see that the eugenic problem is examined with the greatest care, and that the public mind is informed of the issues at stake, so that much that is now unthinkable may at last become thinkable.

Later, in the essay "Too Many People!" (*Our Crowded Planet, Essays on the Pressures of Population*), Huxley asserted,

[It is] the duty of the United Nations, supported by the technologically developed nations, to carry out research on human reproduction and its control.... Already a few countries have an official policy of population

control . . . but they need world encouragement and their policies should be integrated into a general and official world policy. Public opinion is ready for this.

Ah, but we're not quite ready yet to see this survival-of-the-fittest policy in the hands of Dr. Waddill. So *Newsweek* had to ask, "Was it abortion or murder?" (to keep us thinking there just might be some kind of difference).

Time and Newspeak

Nonetheless, public opinion is fast getting "ready." Remember that in May of 1973, four months after the landmark Supreme Court ruling, *Time* raised a few eyebrows when it quoted Nobel Prize winner James D. Watson as saying, "If a child were not declared alive until three days after birth, then . . . the doctor could allow the child to die if the parents so choose and save a lot of misery and suffering. I believe this view is the only rational, compassionate attitude to have."

One university's chief of pediatrics had the nerve to suggest a system whereby "well-born or minorly defective children can be exterminated before the twelfth month of post-gestational life without causing concern to the society as a whole." Scarcely anyone complained.

Back in September of 1970, in their not-really-for-public-consumption journal, the California Medical Association leaked the game plan:

The traditional Western ethic has always placed great emphasis on the intrinsic worth and value of every human life. This ethic has had the blessing of the Judeo-Christian heritage and has been the basis for most of our laws and much of our social policy and has also been a keystone of Western medicine. This traditional ethic is still clearly dominant, but there is much to suggest that it is being eroded at its core and may eventually be abandoned. Since the old ethic has not yet been fully displaced, it has been necessary to separate the idea of abortion from the idea of killing, which continues to be socially abhorrent. The result has been a curious avoidance of the scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception and is continuous whether intra- or extra-uterine until death. The very considerable semantic gymnastics which are required to rationalize abortion as anything but taking a human life would be ludicrous if they were not often put forth under socially impeccable auspices.

It is suggested that this schizophrenic sort of subterfuge is necessary, because while a new ethic is being accepted, the old one has not yet been rejected. Medicine's role with respect to changing attitudes toward abortion may well be a prototype of what is to occur. One may anticipate further development of these roles as the problems of birth control and birth selection are extended inevitably' to death selection and death control whether by the individual or by society. It is not too early for our profession to examine the new ethic, and prepare to apply it in a rational development for the fulfillment and betterment of mankind in what is almost certain to be a biologically oriented world society.

So here's what the people in high places are accomplishing with all those "very considerable semantic gymnastics which are required to rationalize abortion as anything but taking a human life." They're making us "biologically oriented" (as opposed to spiritually oriented). They're making us see a living human being and a dead body as practically the same thing-just two different phases of one biochemical process. They'll have a tough time bringing it off, though, because anyone who can think a little logically can see that there's no way you can reverse the process-no chemical you can add to change a dead body back into a living human being. Something's missing, and that is the spiritual element, the soul. What's more, the soul who is now giving life to an "intrauterine" body is the same soul who will some day give life to a big "extra-uterine" body. So whether we destroy his extra-uterine body or his tiny intrauterine body, it's not just some biochemical phenomenon. It's murder. We're ripping another person's body away from him. But once we forget the inner soul and become "biologically oriented," we can murder people we find inconsequential or inconvenient and call it the "new ethic."

In fact, once we submerge our spirituality and become "biologically oriented," we'll see that killing babies is our "new ethic" at its summit the only compassionate attitude to have." As American Civil Liberties Union lawyer Herman Schwartz pointed out in *The Humanist*, ". . . abortion proponents seek only to permit those who feel it necessary to destroy unborn organisms . . . with no discernible personality at all, in order to reduce human suffering." Biologically, what's wrong with that? Babies, of course, are not as biologically "viable" or "capable of meaningful life" as we are. So their suffering isn't really as "meaningful" or as "human."

Biologically, this is surely "the only attitude to have," but let us suggest that our scientists and doctors and public policy-makers stop calling it "compassionate." Why not just say that once you've become "biologically oriented," you won't have to feel guilty about being selfish? Why lead a double life? Come out and shout it: "I'm a selfish animal."

No one expects an animal to be compassionate anyway, so at least be honest about it. All you scientific and sociopolitical movers and shakers who've so often told us how much we need to get in touch with our essential animality, why not unabashedly show us the way? Why go through all the strain and drain of wearing suits and ties and holding huge conferences on compassion and concern? Compassion is a human quality. If you have no compassion for human babies, then why persist in calling yourselves "humanists"? If you can't live with the name "animalists," perhaps it's because your God-given human intelligence is trying to tell you something. Something about your own essential spirituality, and that of the babies you've chalked off to your "biologically oriented world society."

Abortion's Trial And Error - by Mathuresa Dasa

Nov 1, 1983

Despite being a layman in the matter of law, I would like to step forward and apply a few commonsense legal rules of thumb to one of this century's most fiercely debated issues: abortion.

Even most proabortionists would agree that, biologically speaking, life begins at conception, when the sperm mixes with the ovum in one of the fallopian tubes. But the abortion debate hinges on the question not of when *life* begins but of when *human* life begins. When does the fertilized egg, fetus, or child in the womb become a human being, a person entitled to full protection under the law?

There is little consensus on the answer to this essential question. Scientists, philosophers, and theologians show up on both sides of the debate, some claiming that human life begins at conception, others asserting that it doesn't begin until birth, or even later. Various medical authorities have designated each stage of pregnancy between conception and birth as the beginning of human life. Implantation, when the fertilized egg becomes embedded in the wall of the uterus (about a week after conception); the start of a regular fetal heartbeat (about thirty days after conception); the point at which brainwaves appear on an electroencephalograph (about forty-five days); and viability, the stage at which the

fetus can survive outside the womb all are likely candidates for the start of human life.

Faced with this broad range of conflicting opinions, the U.S. Supreme Court admitted in the 1973 case of *Roe v. Wade* that it was unable "to resolve the difficult question of when [human] life begins." The Court confirmed that if the fetus were indeed a person, his right to life would have to be guaranteed. But who was to answer the crucial question? Justice Blackmun, author of the majority opinion, wrote: "When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to the answer."

At this point the lawyer in me begins to stir. Justice Blackmun's statement clearly acknowledges that the fetus might be a person. It would seem to follow that we shouldn't risk destroying it until we find out for sure. Every Perry Mason fan knows that a defendant is innocent until proven guilty "beyond a reasonable doubt." This protects the defendant from unjust punishment, especially if his life is at stake. Although we are not trying to decide whether the fetus is innocent or guilty but whether it is human or not, the same principle applies: to protect the fetal "defendant" we have to assume he's a person. If we go ahead and allow abortion, we risk being guilty, as the proliferers say, of murder.

Anyone at all familiar with the abortion issue knows, however, that *Roe v. Wade* was the landmark decision that overturned all existing abortion laws and cleared the way for mass abortions. Even though the Court had indirectly admitted that the fetus might be a person, the decision made abortion legal from the day of conception right up to the day of birth. In a concession to antiabortion forces, the Court allowed the states to forbid abortion after the sixth month of pregnancy unless pregnancy threatens the woman's health. The Court failed to define "health," however, thus leaving a gaping loophole in would-be state restrictions. According to the World Health Organization, health is "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not simply the absence of illness and disease." On the basis of this or other broad definitions, any woman, with the assistance of an obliging doctor, could have her pregnancy diagnosed at any stage as a threat to her health.

The *Roe v. Wade* decision was so contradictory that even some leaders of the proabortion movement were a little dismayed. Why hadn't the Court gone ahead and defined human life as beginning at birth? Instead, it had admitted that human life might begin in the womb and then legalized abortion anyway. The liberalization

of abortion laws was welcome, but the logical grounds for the Court's decision were flimsy at best.

On the other side, leaders of the anti-abortion movement, outraged by the decision, sought to nullify it by introducing a constitutional amendment called the Helms-Hyde bill. This bill attempted to answer the question the Court had so carefully skirted: "For the purpose of enforcing the obligation of the states under the fourteenth Amendment not to deprive persons of life without due process of law, human life shall be deemed to exist from conception." The bill was defeated in Congress, and *Roe v. Wade* remains the standard for abortion up to the present day.

But critics, President Reagan among them, continue to underline the decision's basic flaw. In a 1981 press conference Reagan said: "Until we make to the best of our ability a determination of when life begins, we've been opting on the basis that 'Well, let's consider they're not alive.' I think that everything in our society calls for opting that they might be alive."

From the Vedic viewpoint, the Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*, while untenable, was not surprising. The *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, the topmost Vedic literature, explains that when a society considers sensual enjoyment the goal of life, the result is bound to be madness. According to the *Bhagavatam*, the desire for unrestricted sensual pleasure drives materialistic societies to perform activities that defy even common sense and betray a collective mentality more base than that of the dogs and pigs. To attain the goal of sensual pleasure, a materialistic society can sacrifice everything else, including life itself.

Modern materialistic societies have invested virtually all their time and energy in the pursuit of sensual pleasure, especially sex, and the unborn child is a most serious threat to that investment. Justice Blackmun put it like this: "Maternity, or additional offspring, may force upon a woman a distressful life in the future. Psychological harm may be imminent. Mental and physical health may be taxed by child care. There is also the distress, for all concerned, associated with the unwanted child, and there is the problem of bringing the child into a family already unable, psychologically and otherwise, to care for it."

Justice Blackmun would have been more direct if he'd said that the child in the womb interferes with a carefree life of sexual intercourse without responsibility and consequences. Pregnancy is long and troublesome; birth is usually painful and expensive. The newborn child requires constant care and attention and creates a financial burden for the parents or for the government that may last for twenty years or more. And more often than not the unborn child is a social embarrassment as

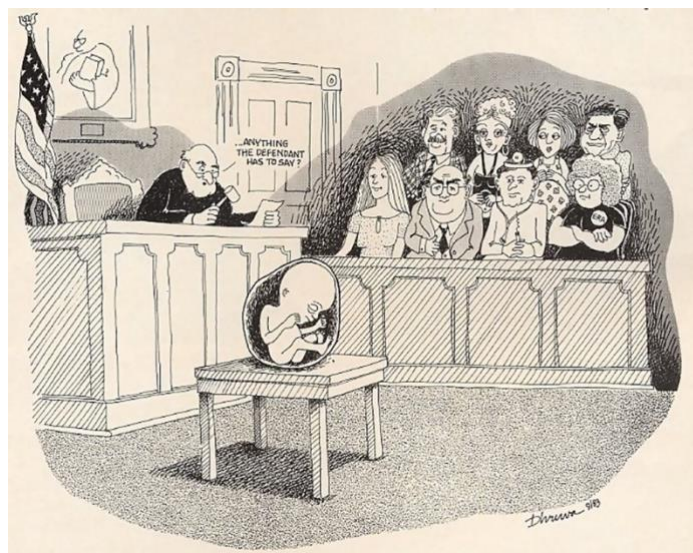
well: seventy-five percent of the women who have abortions are unmarried; sixty-six percent are between fifteen and twenty-four years old.

Faced with this threat to its considerable investment in sexual enjoyment, a materialistic society arranges to eliminate the child before he leaves the womb. When a society is caught in the passionate grip of sexual attraction, its decision to sanction abortion doesn't rest ultimately on philosophical, theological, or scientific considerations. No, abortion is just plain good business. In a society suffering from madness, even the highest judicial body may either ignore the fact that abortion could be murder, or just not care.

Here again it doesn't take a lawyer to expose a flagrant violation of a very basic principle of justice. From merely reading the morning papers, one can learn to what lengths the American judiciary will go to select an unprejudiced jury. This is especially true when the defendant is both well known and disliked. John W. Hinckley, for example, was so infamous that the court had to devote an extraordinary amount of time to finding impartial jurors. Many attorneys believe trials are frequently won or lost during jury selection.

And yet, in the trial of perhaps the best known and most disliked defendant of all the unwanted fetus no one has tried to find an impartial jury. Why has the fetal defendant been judged nonhuman despite strong evidence to the contrary? Because the "jury" in this case, a society insanely addicted to sex is strongly biased against him. It has everything to gain by judging the child nonhuman, everything to lose if he's judged human.

To set the abortion issue straight, therefore, we need to select an impartial jury a group of men and women to whom the unborn child is not a threat. The jurors must be persons who have the highest reverence for human life, who feel that although the mother's physical and mental health may be strained by bearing and raising offspring, these hardships alone are no justification for destroying the child in the womb. In other words, an impartial jury must consist of men and women who, understanding that the highest goal of human life is self-realization, have permanently set aside the maddening, piggish life of sense enjoyment.



Is Something Wrong in the Right-to-Life Movement? - by Hridayananda Dasa Goswami

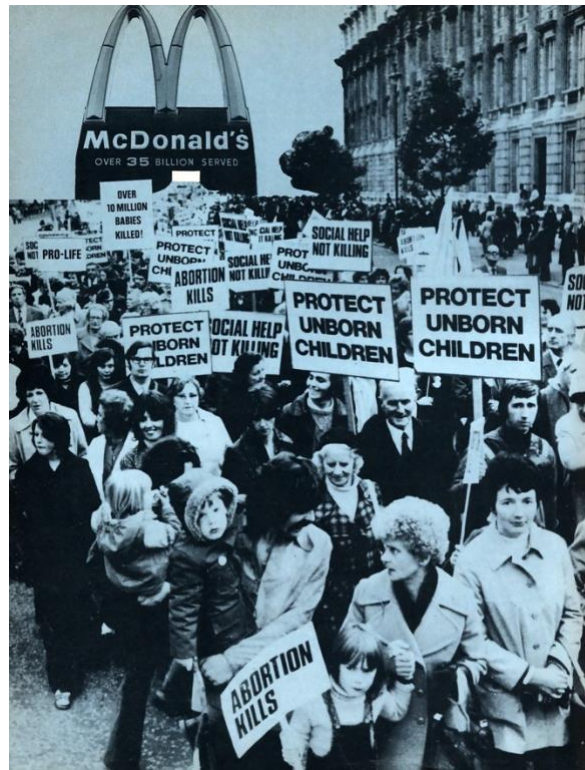
Feb 1, 1982

*Beastly injustice threatens the struggle
for "the sanctity of human life."*

The abortion debate usually centers on the search for a precise determination of when life begins. Distinguished medical researchers have argued that real and unique human life begins at the moment of conception, when the male sperm and the female ovum unite, because at that point the ovum contains the forty-six chromosomes necessary to guide human development. Those favoring abortion argue that although the complete genetic code for human life is present at conception, this code is not itself a human being but only a necessary precondition for human life.

Insisting that human life begins at conception, the anti-abortion movement seeks to shock us into the awareness that abortion means killing a human being rather than an animal, a bird, an insect, or a fish. Thus although the movement calls itself "pro-life," it is really pro-*human*-life. Its fudging with the terms *life* and *human life* reveals a disturbing assumption: that nonhuman life is somehow not actually life at all, or, if it is, then it is somehow not as "sacred" as human life and therefore not worth protecting.

But when we study the distinctions between human life and other life, such as that of the monkeys or cows, we find that the distinction rests almost entirely on the presence of rational intelligence in the human being. Thus if we accept that only human life is sacred, we run the risk of awarding sacred status to human beings simply because they are more intelligent than lower animals. And we also admit the principle of superior legal status for the more intelligent. (The Supreme Court has also stated that the reason we may kill the fetus is that it is not viable before a certain



number of weeks it cannot live outside the womb. But mature animals are certainly viable, since they efficiently maintain themselves outside the womb or egg. So why does the Supreme Court allow us to kill animals?) Once we accept the principle that a more intelligent form of life may kill a less intelligent form, we may ask why more intelligent human beings may not kill those who are less intelligent.

We may argue that animals are not able to live at our level of awareness, communication, or consciousness. On the other hand, a genius may argue that since ordinary human beings cannot live at his level of awareness, communication, or consciousness, they may be killed and even consumed to alleviate both the population explosion and the world food shortage. The retarded, the senile, the infirm, and other wards of society would be especially eligible for this fate.

These are the ghastly conclusions we are driven to when we try to condemn abortion while defending animal slaughter.

To shed some further light on the questions the abortion issue poses, let us turn toward the East for a moment, to the world's oldest literature, the Sanskrit Vedic literature of India. In the most important of these writings, the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, we find the following statement:

*karmana daiva-netrena
jantur dehopapattaye
striyah pravista udaram
pumso retah-kanasrayah*

"Under the supervision of the Supreme Lord and according to the result of his work, the living entity, the soul, is made to enter into the womb of a woman through the particle of male semen to assume a particular type of body." (*Bhag.* 3.31.1)

Subsequent verses go on to say. "On the first night the sperm and ovum mix, and on the fifth night the mixture ferments into a bubble. On the tenth night it develops into a form like a plum, and after that it gradually turns into a lump of flesh. In the course of a month a head is formed, and at the end of three months the nails, fingers, toes, body hair, bones, and skin appear, as do the organ of generation and the other apertures of the body, namely the eyes, nostrils, ears, mouth, and anus." The seers of Vedic times apparently knew with great precision how the fetus develops in the womb.

The most important point mentioned here, however, is that the soul "exists within the semen of the father" (*retah-kanasrayah*). Then, "the soul within the particle of male semen is injected into the womb of the mother" (*striyah pravista udaram*). This all goes on "under the supervision of God" (*daiva-netrena*), and the

result is "the generation of a new material body" (*dehopapattaye*). From the Vedic viewpoint, then, life is present even *before* the moment of conception, what to speak of afterwards.

Today there is growing interest in the doctrine of transmigration of the soul. The concept that an eternal soul has fallen into the material world and is repeatedly taking birth according to his polluted material desires, and that eventually he must go back home, back to God, is an idea that was current and popular among some Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Pythagoras, and among early Christians, such as Origen.

How does transmigration relate to abortion? According to the quotation from *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, it is the law of God that the eternal soul be placed within the male semen and then injected into the womb of the mother. Thus according to the wisdom of the East, the person himself, the soul, is present even before conception, and certainly after. What evolves in the womb of the mother is the outer covering of an eternal person, and no one has the right at any stage of embryonic development to mercilessly drag the soul out of the womb into which God has placed him.

In the *Bhagavad-gita*, an essential Vedic text written five thousand years ago, we find a simple analogy: Just as we dress ourselves in various clothes and then discard them, we, the soul or self, similarly dress ourselves in different material bodies and then discard *them*. Unfortunately, that the self is nothing more than the physical and chemical body is an idea that permeates all aspects of modern society and even infects the so-called religious aspects. This spiritual blindness severely weakens anti-abortion appeals to the sacredness of all life.

In fact, however, each of us *is* an eternal spirit soul; we are not the material body that covers us. Every life form whether bird, insect, fish, mammal, plant, or fetus houses an individual, eternal soul as well as the Supreme Soul, who accompanies the individual soul as he transmigrates from body to body in his ill-fated adventures throughout the material universe. Thus every form of life is sacred and should never be whimsically destroyed.

So the only spiritually consistent foundation for the pro-life movement would be the firm belief in the sacredness of *all* life, a belief based on the awareness of the presence of the soul in all living beings. The pro-life movement prides itself on its moral alertness and personal sacrifice for a higher principle. But if the pro-lifers do not accept the sacred status of all life, if they are unwilling to undergo the sacrifice of investigating the actual nature of the soul, then their arguments will contain the seed of atheism, which is the undoer of all morality.

Unfortunately, it seems that the prevailing view that life is nothing but a conglomeration of chemicals moving according to rigid, impersonal laws of nature has penetrated into the ranks of the pro-life movement. For example, even such a learned and moral man as Dr. J.C. Willke states in his *Handbook on Abortion*:

Did you come from a fertilized ovum? No, you once *were* a fertilized ovum who grew and developed into the child or adult you are today. Nothing has been added to the fertilized ovum you once were except nutrition. You are now more developed, larger and more mature, but you were all there at the beginning.

But Dr. Willke is dead wrong. We have never been ova, nor will we ever become ova in the future, nor are we the gross physical body. We are eternal spiritual souls, part and parcel of God. Unfortunately, Western civilization is totally bereft of any clear understanding of the soul and God.

The actual issue today, of which the abortion issue is the most dramatic manifestation, is the perennial debate between materialism and spiritualism, between atheism and godliness, between the saintly life and the sinful life. A saintly person, a person aware of his constitutional position as a spiritual soul, part and parcel of God, will recognize God as the true proprietor of everything. Such a person will use everything he has, including his body and mind, in the service of the Lord. Although many women foolishly state that they are the proprietors of their own bodies and may therefore kill their own babies, the fact is that none of these women created her own body, nor can any of them protect her body when, by God's law, she is dragged out of it at death. The body is created by material nature under the supervision of God; so how can anyone claim to own his or her body?

The concept of the body's belonging to an individual is based on the false doctrine of humanism, the hallucination of a man-centered world. Sad to say, this humanistic idea has its very roots in the traditions of most modern religions, which teach that God's principal activity is to provide for the happiness of human beings, to watch over us and reward or punish us. Traditional Western religion thus defines God's identity in terms of our own life. *We* are the subjects, *we* are the doers, *we* are the enjoyers and sufferers, and God is merely controlling our fate.

So even our so-called religious concepts are man-centered, not God-centered. We do not see God as the supreme enjoyer of everything. We do not see the universe as existing exclusively for God's pleasure. We do not see God as the supreme proprietor of everything. And consequently even our religious traditions do not have the power to establish a truly moral society.

The Vedic literature calls this type of religion *kaitava-dharma*, "cheating religion." Undoubtedly, the goal of Christianity, Judaism, and other bona fide religions is love of God. But love implies service. One who truly loves God will accept Him as the supreme proprietor and enjoyer and not foolishly think God is meant to be our order supplier. If people have a real sense of God consciousness, they can accept sacrifice and austerity, and this will eliminate most of the problem the pro-lifers are trying to combat.

This brings us to the final point of our discussion. It is obvious that the root cause of the abortion problem is widespread promiscuity, which is the result of equally widespread ignorance of even basic spiritual principles. Unless people learn the actual purpose of human life to revive our eternal loving relationship with God they will continue to be obsessed with illicit sex, and it will be very difficult to stop abortion.

Modern society has completely misunderstood the great responsibility of human life. Both promiscuity, which is the result of equally widespread ignorance of even basic spiritual principles. Unless people learn the actual purpose of human life to revive our eternal loving relationship with God they will continue to be obsessed with illicit sex, and it will be very difficult to stop abortion.

Modern society has completely misunderstood the great responsibility of human life. Both we and the animals need food, sex, sleep, and protection, but only we human beings have the intelligence to understand God and to solve the problems of life birth, old age, disease, and death. America's obsession with sex, and the resultant atrocities committed to get rid of unwanted fetuses, show a great degradation in human society. We are distinguished from the animals by our expanded awareness, which allows us to be religious: we can understand God. A pig or a dog cannot understand God, although a pig or a dog may have sex, eat, drink, and be merry. A pig or a dog may even defend its own kind, but a pig or a dog cannot serve God and accept Him as the supreme enjoyer of everything. If we think that religion exists to provide God's blessings in the form of prosperity and material happiness, then we are subtly adopting the same mentality as the atheist.

If we accept the atheistic propaganda that life evolves from matter, that life does not come from the soul, then we will find it impossible to sustain a moral society. But if we do recognize that life comes from the soul, then we must recognize that all living beings must have a soul and thus be in some way sacred. The *Bhagavad-gita* and other Vedic writings clearly explain these points.

How can materialistic men who have the enjoying spirit of monkeys and dogs be allowed to make laws that openly violate the universal laws of God? How can a

nation prosper when men who are less than animals are allowed to sit on high-court benches and authorize young girls to murder their own children? Through the democratic process, men who are less than animals should be replaced by actual human beings who know God and respect His laws.

If the pro-life movement can become part of a broader struggle to recognize the sacredness of all life and to preserve the special status of human society, based on the spiritual mission of the human being, then undoubtedly it will attain great success.

Fetus Fiasco - by Drutakarma Dasa

Oct 1, 1984

About five thousand years ago the great sage Vyasadeva made the following prediction: "In the Kali-yuga [the present age of quarrel and hypocrisy] the following things will diminish: religion, truthfulness, cleanliness, mercy, duration of life, bodily strength, and memory."

The decrease in the quality of mercy is particularly noticeable in the phenomenon of abortion, the deliberate killing of unborn children. It's hard to think of any act more merciless, yet last year there were 1.3 million legal abortions in America.

Considering the overwhelming instinct of humans to protect children once they are born, it is hard to see why abortion is tolerated. Part of the reason seems to lie in the fact that many people do not see abortion as killing. By a kind of doublethink, they deny the status of humanity to the fetus.

That the nation's courts are taking a leading role in fostering this misconception is extremely unfortunate. A recent decision by the California State Court of Appeals, reported in *The Los Angeles Times* (July 3, 1984), illustrates the point.



Two years ago, sixteen thousand human fetuses stored in jars of formaldehyde were found in a repossessed shipping bin belonging to the owner of a pathology lab that had gone out of business. Anti-abortion groups, including the Catholic League,

wanted to hold a memorial funeral service for the fetuses, but were opposed by pro-abortion groups. The matter wound up before a Los Angeles Superior Court justice, who ruled in favor of holding the funeral service.

Upon appeal, however, this judgment was reversed. Writing for the State Court of Appeal, Justice Arleigh Wood said, "It is clear from the record that the Catholic League is a religious organization which regards a fetus as a human being and abortion as murder. While this specific belief may well cross sectarian lines, it is a belief not universally held. Consequently, any state action showing a preference for this belief will be strictly scrutinized and must be invalidated unless it is justified by compelling government interest. . . ."

This logic is sickening to anyone who has not been completely overwhelmed by the ignorance of the age. There is an obvious difference between the sixteen thousand fetuses as they existed in the wombs of their mothers and as they now exist in jars of formaldehyde. It's not at all a question of "belief" the fetuses once displayed the signs of life, and now they no longer do. And the reason that they don't is because of the intervention of abortionists, whose life-depriving actions are sanctioned by the nation's courts. If murder isn't murder, than what is?

The pro-abortionist reply is "It's not murder, because the fetus is not human." But the big fallacy is the pro-abortionists' claim that their views are somehow impartial, whereas the religious view that human life begins at conception is a narrow, sectarian bias. Exactly the opposite is true. The laws of God are the actual impartial and objective universal principles by which human society should be ordered. Proscriptions against murder are found in all religions.

God is the supreme father of all living beings, and He alone is capable of giving guidelines applicable to all. But the so-called laws manufactured by the imperfect, limited intelligence of materialistic men are bound to work *for* the interests of some people and *against* the interests of others.

The exact balance is determined by factors such as the relative political power of the groups in question. Abortion is a good example. Parents are relieved of the burden of raising children resulting from their sexual relations. Government is relieved of the supposed burden of an increasing population. But the unborn children, who can rely upon nothing but the mercy of humanity, are denied the right to life.

Yet it should be noted here that just as the state has the means to enforce compliance with its imperfect man-made laws, God has made arrangements to enforce compliance with His perfect, universally applicable laws, such as "Thou shall not kill." The principles of cosmic justice are administered through the operations

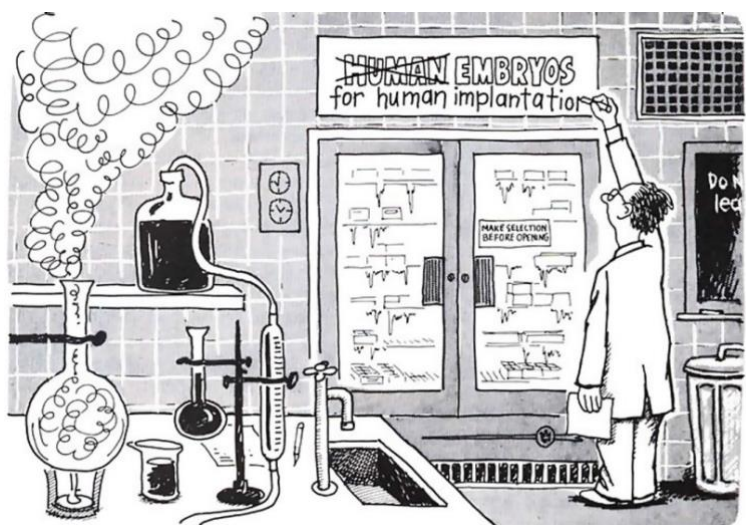
of *karma*, by which those who cause injury to others must themselves undergo equivalent suffering. Quite simply, this means that there is a very good chance that those responsible for abortion will undergo a similar fate in their next lives. Just a belief? Let's wait and see.

Souls On Ice - by Dvarakadhisa Devi Dasi

Bring up the subject of abortion at any social gathering and you're sure to ignite sparks. On both sides of this heated issue, convictions run deep, and for either party compromise is usually unthinkable. One reason the controversy over the moral complexities of abortion continues to rage is the absence of any authority to clarify the basic points of contention. For example, the combined efforts of our scientists and legal experts have been unable to produce a simple definition of precisely when human life begins. The Supreme Court skirted the issue in 1973 in the famous *Roe vs. Wade* decision, which upholds that a woman's right to govern her own body overrides the right to life of her unborn child. That decision has opened the door for our current system of abortion-on-demand.

Now the courts, this time in Australia, may get another shot at the hordes of unborn, unwanted infants. In Melbourne, two miniscule human embryos are drawing a lot of attention as they float silently in a freezer tank at Queen Victoria Medical Center. The embryos were intended to be implanted in the womb of Elsa Rios, who entered the clinic in 1981. After one unsuccessful attempt at implantation, Elsa and her husband never returned to the clinic, leaving the two embryos frozen in suspended animation. Last year the couple was killed in a plane crash, leaving no word on the care of their two heirs-to-be. Now the question attracting all the attention is what to do with the hapless orphans: implant them in another womb and give them the chance to enjoy their inheritance, or simply allow them to thaw and perish?

The forces on both sides of the abortion issue quickly realized the implications involved in such a decision. To treat unimplanted frozen embryos as legal entities entitled by law to the shelter



of a womb would be devastating to the abortionist platform. On the other hand, the right-to-life groups will be outraged if the embryos are thrown out as useless property. Australia's court system is unwilling (or unable) to offer any substantial guidance, and the scientific community is hampered by its continuing bewilderment over the mysteries of conception.

Of course, scientists admit the presence of some viable life force that motivates the development of the human embryo from conception to birth. The argument used by the pro-abortionists, however, is that because the embryo is dependent upon the body of the mother for survival, it should not be considered an individual human being. But is this argument reasonable? Even after the child is born he is still completely dependent upon the mother for survival, yet we do not question that to kill a small baby is murder. Indeed, all living beings are dependent upon some particular physical arrangement to satisfy the needs of their bodies. Human beings need sunshine, food, water, and fresh air; no one would seriously suggest that they must be able to exist without these necessities before they can be accepted as human. So how can we conclude that there is no human life in the early stages of pregnancy?

But the issue of abortion becomes complicated not so much by a lack of scientific evidence and legal clarification as by the desire for unrestricted sexual enjoyment. Society encourages free sexual expression, but no one wants the resultant responsibility for unwanted children. Rather than deal with the difficulties of self-restraint, we have opted for abortion. The issue then becomes how to justify the heinous act of slaughtering helpless, unborn children, dehumanizing the fetus so that our consciousness won't be troubled by thoughts of murder. The bulk of society has now accepted abortion as standard medical procedure, even without assurance from legal or scientific authorities. How will they ever resolve the issue of frozen embryos in Australia without the benefit of any real guidance?

For one familiar with Vedic teachings, the problem is at once painful and comical. That the finest legal and scientific brains are unable to understand that an unborn human child is human is certainly comical. But to witness widespread legalized murder is painful. Thus uncontrolled desire has merely clouded the issue, and neither laypersons nor judges, scientists, or other so-called experts seem competent to comprehend the simple facts about the nature of life. Society should be educated about the soul within the material body. The eternal soul inhabits many varieties of bodies, from insect to demigod, so there should be no difficulty in accepting the existence of a living soul within the human fetus. The soul enters a new body at conception and, when allowed to stay there unhampered, gradually

develops all the faculties of body, intellect, and senses. His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada writes:

The individual particle of spirit soul is a spiritual atom smaller than the material atoms, and such atoms are innumerable. This very small spiritual spark is the basic principle of the material body, and the influence of such a spiritual spark is spread all over the body as the influence of the active principle of some medicine is spread throughout the body. This current of the spirit soul is felt all over the body as consciousness, and that is the proof of the presence of the soul. Any layman can understand that his material body minus consciousness is a dead body, and this consciousness cannot be revived in the body by any means of material administration. Therefore, consciousness is not due to any amount of material combination, but to the spirit soul. (Bg. 2.17, purport)

Thus, with the application of spiritual wisdom, one of the most complicated issues of the day is greatly simplified. Of course, the world will continue to debate the issue of abortion. And as for our little friends in the freezer, the future looks bleak. Most likely, they will perish in thawing, scientists predict, due to the primitive techniques employed at the time of their fertilization. And even if they do make it in and out of the womb, the many legal complications involved will afford the courts plenty of room to avoid the significant issue. How can judges decide on the rights of motherless embryos when they themselves have no insight into the nature of the soul? Thus materialistic society continues to roll along on its unenlightened course, creating confusion and anxiety for all who follow its path. In contrast, spiritual understanding is waiting for those sickened by the bewildering whirl of material life.

Are the Typical Arguments in Favor of Abortion Philosophically Sound?

By Hridayananda Das Goswami

Delivered as an online lecture on 22 February 2020.⁵

Today's class is going to examine typical arguments in favor of abortion or legal abortion. I want to emphasize that for almost all this class, I am not going to give religious arguments. There is a very heavy statement in the *Bhagavatam* about abortion, which I'll give at the end, but I'm not going to argue on the



basis of revealed scriptures or the statements of religious authorities. I'm going to examine the common arguments for abortion in a philosophical sense, and I'm going to ask the question, "Are these arguments philosophically sound?" Just from the point of view of logic and philosophy, I don't think they are, but you can judge for yourself.

Does Human Beings Have a Right to Control Their Own Body?

A very typical argument for abortion, perhaps the most common argument, is that a woman or presumably any human being has a right to control their own body. Let's look at that idea. The first question I want to ask, again philosophically, is who is the person? Who is the person we're talking about? If we are going to be consistent here, if we are claiming that a person has a right to control their own body and therefore a right to an abortion, then logically we cannot be talking about a physical

⁵ https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=206676687055082

being. The body can't be the person for the simple reason that the body is physical, but to have a right to something is metaphysical.

We can point to a physical body, we can point to a chair or a mountain or a glass of water, and we can say this is a physical object. If you believe, as I think we all do, that there is a real material world outside of our minds, that we're not just imagining the world, then these are all physical facts. Your body is a physical fact. However, your right to control your body is not a physical fact. There's no physical thing you can point to and say this is a right. It's very simple. If you have any rights at all, then you cannot be your body because a physical object doesn't have rights, because rights are a metaphysical object.

Another example which I've often given is *equality*. If you believe in equality, then that is incompatible with the idea that we are the body. Because again, bodies are physical objects. They don't have rights, which are metaphysical objects. If you are a soul, that is a metaphysical object that can have other metaphysical attributes, such as having a right. As I've said many times, all the empirical evidence in the world shows that we are not equal. The physical fact is that we're all different. We're not equal. We're not equal in terms of our athletic ability, our artistic ability, our mathematical ability; and yet we reject all of the empirical evidence in establishing a political system, a cultural, legal, judicial system, moral principles. We reject all the empirical evidence, and we say there is a metaphysical fact which stands above all the physical facts.

Absolute & Relative Rights

We're just not equal, and yet we are equal because we are metaphysical beings, and as metaphysical beings, not physical beings, we're equal. Having established that, if someone says that a soul inside a human body has a right to control their own body, is that an absolute right or is it a relative right? For example, do you have the right to control your body in such a way that it kills another body? I hope you would say no.

In fact, we could even say that every law, whether it's a law against rape or murder or if it's a stop sign in a road, and in fact every law in existence, restricts, limits, conditions your right to control your own body because the stop sign says your body must stop. You must stop your body. You could say, "Well, it's my body and

I don't want to stop my body from moving forward in space.” Let's say you're a pedestrian, you're walking, and the sign is forcing your body to stop. You could say, “Well, it's my body,” and still cross the road in full traffic. Tough luck.

Just as individuals have rights, societies have rights, and if society perceives that you, in exercising your right to control your body, are infringing upon, violating the rights of society, then we all accept that society has a legitimate right to restrict, control your right to move your own body. Therefore, saying that a woman or a man has a right to control their own body, it's not a serious argument because it's not considering that there are other factors which would justify society restricting your right to use your body in a particular way. So just saying, “I have a right to do whatever I want with my body.” is bad philosophy.

The Right to Kill

Let's look at some of the further arguments given to justify a person's right to an abortion, a woman's or a man's, because a man can initiate an abortion. Sometimes men, by threats, by psychological pressure, by bribery, induce, or force, or pressure a woman to have an abortion. A government can force an abortion. For example, until very recently, in China, because they were concerned about overpopulation, for decades they had a law that you could only have so many children. If a woman got pregnant and she already had the limit of children, the state could require her to get an abortion.

This is not a philosophical attack on women. Clearly the abortion it's a medical procedure performed on a woman, but does anyone have a right to cause an abortion to be performed on a woman? And we are not talking about a case where the mother's physical or mental health is clearly at risk. We're going to put that aside; that's a special case that deserves its own analysis. Those are special cases, an extremely tiny minority of abortion cases. Let's talk about the overwhelming majority of abortions, in which the abortion is not due to a medical threat to a woman's physical or mental health.

“The Embryo is Part of the Woman's Body”

Now, the embryo is growing in the woman's body, and so people argue, “Well, it's part of the woman's body.” There's a problem with that. For one thing, it goes

against certain federal laws. The killing of an innocent human being is wrong, even if that human being has yet to be born. I'm quoting here from a website, which has a pro and con arguments, procon.org. Unborn babies are considered human beings by the US government. The federal *Unborn Victims of Violence Act*, which was enacted, "to protect unborn children from assault and murder," states that under federal law, anybody intentionally killing or attempting to kill an unborn child shall be punished, "for intentionally killing or attempting to kill a human being." The act also states that an unborn child is "a member of the species homo sapiens." At least 38 states in America have similar fetal homicide laws.

"The Embryo Depends on the Mother's Body"

That's just law, federal law in the United States, and of 38 states at least. But let's go back to philosophy. The general argument given in favor of abortion is that because the fetus physically depends on mother's body, the mother has therefore a right to kill that fetus. I want to extract from that argument the general philosophical claims. If I say, for example, that under certain circumstances, "John has a right to kill Bill," we can state that more generally and say, "Under these circumstances, a person has a right to kill another person." Let's talk about that. What is this argument actually saying? It's saying, in general terms, that if person A is physically dependent on person B, B has a right to kill A. In general terms, that's the argument. Now we could say, "Well, that's only if A is inside the body of B." But for now, let's look at the most general form.

Parents Had the Right to Kill Teenager Children

If you look at history, we find that in many societies in the past, not in India, but in many other societies, it was accepted that this logic is valid: if A depends on B, B has a right to kill A. For example, you see in *The Song of the Volsungs* (a sort of Scandinavian Iliad or Odyssey), that parents had the right to kill children, even up into adolescence. You could have a 16-year-old son or daughter, and you had the right to kill that person. Why? Because they depended on you.

What about a case where a child's born, is still a baby, and is absolutely dependent physically on the mother or the caretaker, so that if that mother or caretaker abandons the child, the child will die in a pretty short period of time? There's a physical dependence. Therefore one could say that even if the child is born, the

mother, father, or whoever is taking care of the child, has a right to kill the child, because dependence establishes the right to kill the dependent being. Now, that's not a very attractive argument.

Does Being Inside the Mother Deprive the Person of All Rights?

Some people think that abortion is a special case because the child is physically still inside the mother; but they would have to show why this fact of being inside the mother somehow deprives the person inside the womb of all rights. We know that a newborn baby is many years away from full mental and physical development, and yet because that child is in the process of development. The law, especially the law about the child that's born, considers that we have to look at the biological direction, that it's a person that simply hasn't developed all of its powers yet and it still has to be counted as a person. Upon fertilization, a human individual is created with a unique genetic identity that remains unchanged throughout his or her life. So genetically, you are a complete person at conception. You are genetically complete. You are all you are ever going to be in terms of your body.

The Stroke Victim

Let's give an analogy. You are in your home, and someone comes to visit you. Now let's say that that person, God forbid, suffers a stroke, and becomes completely disabled. Can't even breathe on their own, and you do resuscitation, you're breathing into that person's mouth. At that point, that person absolutely depends on you. That person cannot survive even several seconds without your help. Does that give you the right to kill the person?

You could say that's not the same as being within someone's body. Well, go back to our metaphysical assumption, that as a physical being, you have no rights. If you're not a metaphysical being, you have no rights. So why are we even having this discussion? If you think you have rights, you are claiming to be, logically, philosophically, a metaphysical being, and therefore you are living inside your body. (Actually, more and more philosophers and scientists are realizing that consciousness is not just a physical part of the body.)

You could say the soul lives in the body, which lives in a house. What kind of philosophical argument are you going to give to say that there can only be this many

levels of *living within* to have rights, and if there are less levels, you don't have rights? Where is that coming from? Where are these metaphysical assumptions coming from? Is it just someone's imagination? Here we have a case where someone had a stroke. They're living in your body, in your house. They're absolutely dependent on you for their life, even to breathe. Do you have a right to kill them? If not, why not? I'm not sure there's a good answer to that question. If someone depends on you - on your medical care, or physically depends on you, or are still in your body - you can kill them? What about little baby kangaroos that live in the pouch? They're technically in the mother's body, in the pouch, but they're not biologically inside.

How are you going to justify all these fine distinctions and special rules? What is the general principle? In other words, where is a self-evident, obviously true, general moral principle, metaphysical principle, that somehow under the skin you can kill, outside the skin you can't kill? I don't think there's any coherent philosophical justification.

Building Demolition

Let's say that it is your job to demolish a building, but you hear someone says that there is a child trapped inside that building, and you're not sure, and no one knows. Is the child inside that building or not? And you don't know. What are you going to do? Are you going to say, "Okay, we don't know if the child is in the building or not, so let's destroy the building." Or are you going to say, "Until we find out, we're not going to destroy the building"?

The Kidnapping & the Metaphysical Fact

We have these facts, that you are a metaphysical being. Otherwise, you have no rights at all. There's no need to talk about this. For example, let's say someone kidnaps another person, enslaves another person, and has complete power. Now, as a physical, empirical fact, the kidnapper "owns" the other person's body; has complete control over that person's body. They can do whatever they want with that body, that living body, that person. That's a physical fact. Now, morally, you can say that the kidnapper has no right, that what he is doing is disgusting, that it is evil. If you say that the kidnapper or the slaveholder has no right to do that, what you're saying is that the physical fact doesn't matter. The metaphysical fact matters.

That the physical fact is not what should be. What should be is the metaphysical fact that everyone has a right to live free of slavery, or that no one has a right to kidnap anyone. You're claiming that the physical fact doesn't matter.

When it comes to abortion, someone says that the embryo is inside the mother's body, and that's a physical fact; we all know that. Why in that case the physical fact is enough to determine the metaphysical fact? In the real world, when someone kidnaps someone else and controls their body, we say that is a crime. It is abuse. And you cannot derive a moral principle from the physical fact. In other words, you can't say that because of the physical fact that this person has enslaved that person's body, the moral principle follows that the person has a right to enslave them. The metaphysical moral principle doesn't come out of the physical fact. It is the moral metaphysical principle which must govern the physical fact. Therefore, the fact that a baby is living in the mother's body, that's a physical fact, but it does not determine the metaphysical fact. The metaphysical moral principle governs what should be done physically, which in this case, in my view, is that you have no right to murder another soul's body.

What Philosophical Principle Determines Property?

Generally these abortion debates are not the most philosophical things you'll ever stumble across in your life... If you say that everyone owns their body, it couldn't be just pregnant women. We would have to say that everyone is the proprietor of their own body. Under what conditions, under what circumstances are we justified to say that this person owns that property? What's the metaphysical claim or philosophical principle determining whether the property is a living body, someone else's living body inside your body, a house, a car, a bank account, or a country? What is the general principle? Because you must have a general principle, which you can then apply to a specific case.

John Steals Mary's Lamp

For example, let's say John steals a lamp from Mary's house. The law doesn't say that John cannot steal a lamp from Mary's house. That's much too specific. The law doesn't mention John, it doesn't mention Mary, and it doesn't mention the lamp. The law says you cannot go into someone else's house against their will and against their will take property out of their house. Now, the law says a person cannot. John

is a person. Can't go into someone else's property. Mary's house fits under the general heading of someone's property, and you can't take something. A lamp is something. When we make laws, what we're doing is taking a general principle and if it applies, if it fits a specific case, then that case comes under the power of that law. This is very simple stuff. Therefore, in the case of a woman or a man or anyone saying, "I own my body, my body is my property," what is the general principle, legal or philosophical, that determines when somebody owns something? And does it apply in this case?

A Twist on Marxism

I'll give you an example of one philosophy that was very popular for a while, everyone's heard of it, which would argue against a woman owning her body. (Actually, it's a contradiction within that philosophy, but I'll get to that at the end.) The philosophy I'm talking about is Marxism. Good old Karl Marx. Marx, among other things, is arguing that the people that produce something have a right to enjoy the fruit of their production. He was of course talking as the Industrial Revolution was exploding, with terrible conditions for factory workers and other people like coal miners, really bad conditions. He was very correct to protest that, but he came to some really bad conclusions that resulted in the deaths of tens of millions of innocent people in the 20th century.

Anyway, let's look at Marx's basic point, that the people who produce something, like the workers in a factory, have a right to enjoy commensurately, fairly, the fruits of their own work, of their own production. Simple question, did you build your own body? That's a no-brainer. No, you didn't. Your parents created your body. Therefore, you can see the logic of some ancient societies in the Middle East and Scandinavia, even perhaps in the Roman Empire, "Hey, your mother and father created your body, therefore they own your body." We don't agree with their logic, but we can see what they were thinking. That's sort of a little twist on Marxism, right? Your parents genetically created your body, they built your body, therefore they own it. Therefore, they can kill you if they want. You are, in a sense, a slave of your parents. ‘

Infinite Regress of False Claims of Proprietorship

Now, there's a problem here. There are, of course, lots of problems, but here's one problem: Your parents didn't build their bodies. Their bodies made your body, but your parents didn't own their bodies. Their parents made their bodies, but their parents also didn't make their own bodies. What you have here, at least in Marxism, taking it in this sense, is an infinite regress of false claims of proprietorship. The one person who could make a legitimate claim to owning bodies is, of course, God. If you don't believe, if you say there is no God, okay, let's go with that. There is no God, that means no one owns the body, or that the only true, objective meaning of owning the body, is that someone has physical or psychological power over someone else's body, such as intimidating by the threat of punishment or whatever. The body belongs to someone who, by whatever means, has actual control over someone else's body. You own your body if you have control of your own body, if you can fight off everybody else that wants to get at your body.

Because, if there's no God, and there's no soul, then all these lofty, metaphysical ideas like, "I own my body," they're just blah blah blah. It doesn't mean anything. You're just saying something. If you say, "I own my body," but someone else, from the empirical point of view, has physical control of your body, you can blah blah blah all you want, but that person, at this point in time, controls your body, whatever you may say. We're just talking empirical science, we're not talking morality, we're not talking metaphysics,

I don't think that's the kind of world we want to live in. But if you take Marx seriously, that the people that produce something have a right to enjoy the fruit of their production, on those grounds, you belong to your parents who belong to their parents, and we fall into this infinite regress of false claims of proprietorship over bodies.

Civilization and Savagery

Moving on, to what extent do you really have a right to control your own body? If you do something that doesn't affect other people in any significant way, no one really cares. But, for example, you feel like singing but you are in an apartment building with very thin walls, because it was cheaply built, and there's a rule in that apartment that you cannot disturb your neighbors between certain hours, and you start doing your opera thing, and they come and stop you, because you can't do

that. The simple point is that you only have a right to do whatever you want with your body, as long as it doesn't significantly impact other people.

Does abortion affect other people? If it does, through society they have a legitimate interest to regulate what you do with your body. That's called civilization. And the idea that everyone can do whatever they want with their body, that's called savagery. That's called the law of the jungle. If you like civilization better than the law of the jungle, you don't think that whoever has the power to do it can just rape you, mutilate you, or kidnap you. If that's not the kind of world you want to live in, because you're not an incredible masochist, then you're probably going to vote for civilization over savagery. That simply means that you can only do what you want with your body, as long as it does not significantly impact other people.

So, the question is, since you're not a physical being (if you're a physical being, you have no rights anyway; no need to talk about it), since you're a metaphysical being, then the life in the womb is equally a metaphysical being. You're not the only metaphysical being. Do you therefore have a right to brutalize, to brutally destroy the growing, developing, genetically complete body of another metaphysical entity? Because that's what it is, it's brutality, in an objective, non-judgmental sense, it's just brutality. That's not as easy a question to answer, as some people think, because they don't ask the right question. People think the answer is easy because they don't know what the actual question is.

Crime Has Its Risks

Another idea is that abortion should be legal because in the past women suffered and even died because of illegal abortions. We don't want anyone dying in that way. However, here's the simple fact of life. It may sound a little harsh, but in fact, it's true. In general, crime is dangerous. If you break into people's homes to rob them, there's a serious possibility you will get shot and killed. That's why generally house break-ins don't happen during the day when all the neighbors are out having a party on the street. That's why it's done at night. If you decide that that's your natural vocation, to break into people's houses and steal from them, then your life expectancy will go down a bit, because the average lifespan of people that do that is lower than people that don't do it. Crime is dangerous.

You could say, for example, that when people try to commit rape, sometimes they end up getting themselves killed. Someone is trying to rape a woman or do something bad, and they get themselves injured, or killed in the act of doing that (the woman may have a gun, and just shoot the rapist). Do we therefore conclude that we need to decriminalize rape? Obviously not. When society declares a certain act to be a crime, and someone engages in that act and gets themselves in some kind of harm, it does not automatically mean we should decriminalize the act.

Let's go again to the general philosophical principle that if society criminalizes certain behavior, people who perform that criminal act, sometimes suffer consequences. A society can feel it is justified to criminalize the murder of an innocent child in the womb. Someone may say that we should decriminalize the act and legalize abortion because some women suffer while performing the act. (By the way, I looked it up, and it was actually a very, very small number of women.) We don't want any woman being fatally injured in any kind of medical procedure, whether in a legal or illegal abortion. However, the mere fact that someone commits a crime and ends up dying, does not by itself show the act should be decriminalized. To support that you would have to show that the so-called crime, in this case abortion, is such a trivial harm to society; it's such an insignificant violation of society's principles that the death of certain people outweighs the relatively insignificant, trivial effects of the crime.

Now, is it really true that systematically murdering millions of innocent people in the womb of the mother is a trivial, insignificant evil, and therefore it should be decriminalized? That seems to me that that would be avoiding the whole discussion. I'm not sure that you can show that murdering millions of innocent creatures, who feel pain, who are genetically complete, who if just not bothered in that way will become persons like us, to murder millions of them is such a trivial harm.

For example, in 1965, less than 200 deaths of women were attributed to illegal abortion. Less than 200. That's 200 out of perhaps 900,000 illegal abortions. That means that when abortions were illegal, the number of women who died, which we regret, was one in 4,500. So, should we legalize abortion, with the result that hundreds of thousands, millions more babies are killed to prevent the death of one person in 4,500, a person who is committing a crime according to the standards of that society? If you look at, say, breaking into homes, the number of criminals that do that and get themselves killed, is more than one in 4,500. On that logic, we

should decriminalize breaking into someone's house. What I'm trying to show is that if someone wants to make an argument for illegal abortion, try to make a good one.

Question: "Some argue that if abortion is just criminalized, but without proper spiritual education, they will do the same number, but underground, with more corrupt principles. So, just criminalizing it may not be the solution."

Answer: That's a good point, that especially in a democratic society, you can't successfully just criminalize an activity that huge numbers of people will do anyway. I would say that as a legal historical principle it's true. Obviously in other forms of government other dynamics are going on, but in a democratic society if you don't have a sufficient number of people that believe in the law, the society itself will subvert and neutralize the law, render the law ineffective, and make a different law. So, yes, I think that that's a valid point.

Mental & Physical Consequences

There are serious medical studies done in respectable, peer-reviewed medical journals in Scandinavia showing that there is significant psychological damage caused to mothers who have abortions. Young adult women who undergo abortion may be at increased risk of subsequent depression. Another serious article says that abortion leads to significantly higher rates of anxiety in women. Women who have abortions are 154% more likely to commit suicide than women that didn't; 154%, that's a lot. There is another report in the *British Medical Journal*: Women who had abortions were three times more likely to commit suicide. Three times!

The *International Journal of Epidemiology* explains that that 15% of the cases of miscarriage (the mother loses her child) in the first trimester of the pregnancy (in the first third of the nine-month gestation), 15% of the cases is attributed to a previously induced abortion. A Chinese study published in another peer-reviewed journal found an association between breast cancer and the history of abortions. In other words, the more abortions a woman has, the more likely she is to get breast cancer. You can say that not giving women free access to abortions can lead to certain emotional or physical problems. Well, if they have the abortion, they're three times more likely to kill themselves; they're more likely to get breast cancer. So, there's a whole bunch of facts that we need to put on the table.

What Does the *Bhagavatam* Say?

Bhrūṇa in Sanskrit means embryo, and *vadham* means killing. It's also called *bhrūṇa-hatya*, which also means killing the embryo. In the *Bhagavatam* 9.9.31 it's compared (*yatha*) to killing a saintly *brahmana* or a cow.

[The verse addresses King Saudasa, who had been cursed to become a *raksasa*, a man-eater. It's spoken by the wife of the *brahmana* that the king was about to devour.]

*tasya sādhor apāpasya
bhrūṇasya brahma-vādinaḥ
katham vadham yathā babhror
manyate san-mato bhavan*

tasya — of him; *sādhoḥ* — of the great saintly person; *apāpasya* — of one who has no sinful life; *bhrūṇasya* — of the embryo; *brahma-vādinaḥ* — of one who is well versed in Vedic knowledge; *katham* — how; *vadham* — the killing; *yathā* — as; *babhroḥ* — of a cow; *manyate* — you are thinking; *sat-mataḥ* — well recognized by higher circles; *bhavān* — your good self.

Translation: “You are well known and worshiped in learned circles. How dare you kill this *brāhmaṇa*, who is a saintly, sinless person, well versed in Vedic knowledge? Killing him would be like destroying the embryo within the womb or killing a cow.”

The *Bhagavatam* compares killing the embryo in the womb to killing a saintly *brahmana* or a cow. I won't insult your intelligence by trying to explain that to you.



“The atheist class think like that, that ‘This birth is taking place due to our lusty desires, but we do not want to take responsibility. Then kill him.’ What is that? Therefore, they are making this abortion, killing of the child, as legal. The *kāma*, ‘We had some lusty desires, and we got it, but we don't want it. Kill it.’ That's all. This is going on. This is atheism.”

- Srila Prabhupada's lecture on Bg 16.8,
Tokyo, 28 Jan 1975



EYE of the STORM