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## Moral Challenges of Abortion

By Doug Bandow

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is upset about abortion. Well, not abortion per se. But some abortions. Of girls. Apparently killing boys is okay. Abortion is one issue that is not amenable to easy political compromise. But the issue can't be avoided.



The bottom line of abortion is a dead baby. No amount of obfuscation and euphemism can hide the obvious. And if abortion is a legal right, then motivation is irrelevant. If you have a right to kill all babies, you have a right to kill girl babies.

However, Clinton, a supporter of unrestricted abortion, appears disturbed by the logical outcome of her policy preferences. In commenting on her international agenda for women, she observed that in some nations "girl babies are still being put out to die."

Moreover, she explained, "Obviously, there's work to be done in both India and China, because the infanticide rate of girl babies is still overwhelmingly high, and unfortunately with technology, parents are able to use sonograms to determine the sex of a baby, and to abort girl children simply because they'd rather have a boy. And those are deeply set attitudes."

Clinton's remarks received surprisingly little comment from other advocates of abortion "rights." Pro-lifers suggested that Clinton was a traitor to the abortion cause, but Laurie Carlsson defended the secretary's "nuanced view" on an issue that is "neither simple, nor clean-cut along lines of political beliefs or moral values."

Yet, Clinton challenged two fundamental precepts of the case for legalized abortion. First, she tied the "infanticide rate of girl babies" to sex-selection abortions. If sex-based infanticide and abortion are morally equivalent, then non-discriminatory infanticide and abortion should be morally equivalent as well.

Clinton has raised the core moral challenge of abortion: once we enter the continuum of life, our essential humanity has been established. The moment of birth has no obvious moral distinction. Or else why would Clinton be as upset with those who abort baby girls as with those who put newborn girls out to die?

Second, Clinton undercut the essential argument of abortion activists: there is a right to unrestricted abortion (or abortion "on demand"). That means for any reason. If there is at least one illegitimate reason, might there not be others?

Some people apparently believe that there is no worse offense than to "discriminate," which makes sex-selection abortion so odious to some. National Post writer Barbara Kay says "sex selection is a form of bias — arguably even a form of hatred — against an identifiable group."

But how about abortion of the handicapped, whether physical or mental? Writer George Neumayr warned, "Without much scrutiny or debate, a eugenics designed to weed out the disabled has become commonplace." This is also discrimination.

Nor does discrimination, or even "hatred," necessarily stop there. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg recently discussed *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion, and noted the "concern about population growth and particularly growth in populations that we don't want to have too many of."

Presumably, she was referring to racial minorities. Cannot abortion be considered a form of society-wide discrimination?

And if we can judge the motives of those who choose abortion, then should we not critically assess other purported justifications? Why is it worse to decide that the baby's sex is "wrong" than to decide that the pregnancy's timing is "wrong."

Clinton's apparent position, that people are free to choose abortion for any reason, except the one reason she finds distasteful, is intellectually unsustainable.

Perhaps the secretary still believes the procedure should be legal. Yet, she coupled infanticide with abortion, and presumably believes that more than persuasion is necessary in the former case. Again, there is no clear line between infanticide and abortion. The females are killed: the only question is when?

In any case, the law is never going to be able to control motives. If other abortions are legal, then anyone desiring one for the purpose of sex selection merely need state anything else — or nothing — and the law would not stand in the way.

Australia, Canada, China and India all formally ban the practice. Some would follow in the United States. However, these measures are wasted efforts so long as abortion is largely unrestricted.

Clinton has grasped an essential truth: It is wrong to kill baby girls. But it also is wrong to kill baby boys.

The problem is not sex-selection abortion. The problem is abortion. Many politicians desperately hope that the issue will go away, but it remains one of today's most profound moral challenges.

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