

THE "TRIVIAL" FACTOR IN THE GREAT ABORTION DEBATE consciousness-raising about the sociology of language

Last night an 80-year-old who'd been force-fed died at the Cape Cod Hospital, where today, during an ethics-panel discussion of the case, I, though against that coercion, pointed out the unfairness of the "autonomy/paternalism," the function of the second term being to unlevel the playingfield in favor of patients' rights: the level-playing-field way of stating the options being "autonomy/heteronomy" (with, said I, "theonomy" as "the ultimate context"). "Paternalism" (fatherlike managing "benevolently and often intrusively" [RHD2]) is not the only category of heteronomy (decision-making by "others") in a hospital, so in this context the word's (1) **inadequate** (not covering the range) & (2) designedly (as rhetorical) **unfair**. In presenting this coupling of terms, the ethicist-moderator **intended** to weight the discussion in our favor ("our," as his & my opinion on the case were the same)....Which, in the instance of the current great abortion debate, is what I'm getting at in this Thinksheet: sociology of language teaches us the hermeneutics of suspicion in logomachy, word-battling: "Cherché l'intention!" (Seek out what's being intended within the range of possibilities!)....This grid presents the range, & I'll be discussing the "trivial" factor in position **E**, that of Suzio in two letters in CCT, 10 & [herewith] 29 Oct 89, my 4 Nov 89 reply herewith....NOTE on "trivial": The Medieval curriculum called "trivium" [Latin for "three-way intersection"] combined grammar, logic, & rhetoric--or mastery of language, thinking, & persuasion--all of which is caught up in my present phrase, "sociology of language."

pro-choice persuasion coercion

BIRTH	A	C	E
ABORTION	B	D	F

Forget **F**: nobody's pushing seizing women for forced abortion (China has been wrongly accused of it).... **AB** is simple pro-choice, society using no pressures either to give birth or to abort & no laws aimed at passive coercion to birth (by active proscription of abortion). Says former Surg.Gen. Ev. Coop, "With the new pill, abortion will be only between a woman & her medicine cabinet."....**CE** is pro-birth. **C** includes those anti-abortion clinics set up (1) to persuade to give birth & (2) to provide pre- & post-natal services. **E** directs its resources, including language, toward legislation aimed at passive coercion to birth (by active proscription of abortion). This is the position I'm attacking in these Thinksheets, as in many past Thinksheets (though no two from the same angle, so don't complain "Willis is doing his same thing again!")....**D**, my position, is this: When in doubt, abort--the opposite of **C**, which is this: When in doubt, give birth. **D** is pro-abortion.

Destroying the unborn is murder

I am writing this letter in response to several pro-choice letters which appeared in your newspaper recently.

The question was asked, "How can anyone seriously call a tiny cluster of newly formed cells a baby and aborting it murder?"

The science of genetics, biology and fetalogy confirm unequivocally that the unborn are of the species homo sapiens (human), have existence (being) and are alive. Noted pro-abortionist Dr. Alan Guttmacher acknowledged this fact in his book, "Birth Control and Love," when he said: "Fertilization, then, has taken place; a baby has been conceived."

Whether one wants to call the unborn children, babies, fetuses, embryos, etc., is irrelevant since all these terms refer to human beings at different stages of development. The fact remains that the unborn are living members of the human race. Destroying the unborn is therefore killing, as was pointed out by the California Medical Association.

"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 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."

Fewer than 1 percent of the 1.5 million abortions performed annually in the U.S. (20 million plus since Roe vs. Wade) are done for rape or incest victims. What about the other 99-plus percent?

The ills of this world are not cured by killing the unborn. One does not save life by destroying it.

JEAN M. SUZIO
Yarmouthport

Letters

Sermons, science on abortion issue

In her Oct. 29 letter, "Destroying the Unborn is Murder," Jean Suzio unfairly criticizes us who refuse to call a fetus a "baby." Her failure is based on ignorance of the sociology of language.

We all know what a "rock" is. It's a big stone, not a "baby." Human values and societal decisions are not involved in our calling a rock a rock.

A "baby" is at a third level of linguistic complexity. You can get everybody to agree on what a rock is.

But when you say "baby," people will point to different realities. Extreme materialists will insist that every zygote, unicellular "human being," is a baby.

At the other extreme are those who exclude neonates, infants, from the category of "baby": they want to allow for the passive infanticide of horribly deformed or physiologically crippled neonates. And you know why the other extreme wants to call all zygotes "babies": they want to make the most radical case against abortion.

"Baby" is a social word, its use dependent on social intention. Thus also with the expression "human life."

Radical pacifists call war "murder" because "murder" is a social word meaning societally disapproved killing. Except as preaching, it cannot be applied to societally approved killing, such as abortion, capital punishment and war.

Ms. Suzio's illusion is that she's saying something scientific and undeniable. Instead, she's preaching. I'm a preacher by conviction and profession, so I'm not against her doing preaching. I just don't happen to like her sermon.

And it worries me to have preachers going around deluded with the self-infatuation that their sermons are scientific.

WILLIS ELLIOTT
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1. Yesterday, the U.S. Conference of (Roman) Catholic Bishops said abortion is "the [!] fundamental human rights issue" & denied there's any room for dissent. More than on Scripture, whose voice can be honestly & competently sounded on either side, the bishops support their position by tradition, including RC "natural law" thinking. So dug in is the RC hierarchy on this, here & everywhere, that for at least another generation we can count on nothing but obstruction from this church on issues of conception control other than rhythm & of birth control (abortion being, literally, the only form of "birth control": preventing live birth, as conception control prevents conception). Heartbreaking for Christian unity, hopebreaking for us environmentalists, & oppressive to millions of unwillingly pregnant now & in the future.
2. A generalization claiming to include all us Americans is almost certainly a net unable to catch us all. Suzio's earlier letter fails: "Regardless of what religion we practice, to what religious party we're registered, to what set of economic principles we prescribe, our ideas of justice are rooted in a basic belief that human life is inherently valuable and sacred."....Where did she get that idea? Probably in public schools. For generations they've been indoctrinating Americans with this alien philosophy....By contrast, our Founders believed & taught that the value of human life (& the rights thereof) is derivative, not inherent. As the Declaration of Independence puts it, humans are "endowed by their Creator": life & rights are gifts, and gifts are not inherent possessions....Is that mere quibbling over adjectives? On the contrary, it's a clue to why the French Revolution failed & ours succeeded. But ours too will fail if we forget God, from whom our benefits and our very life derive....Suzio's control-term here is "human life," into which she packs all zygotes as "living members of the human race" & accordingly (one giant leap!) entitled to equal protection under the laws. And she accuses my side of "semantic gymnastics" & "schizophrenic...subterfuge" (by qt.)!
3. "The unborn" is another expansive-inclusive term. Since we ourselves were once unborn (so runs her illogic), why should we accord the as yet unborn any lower status than we accord ourselves?
4. "Baby" is proleptically applied to prebabies, the preborn, usually in the later stages of gestation. Both simplicity (avoiding a range of terms where, in ordinary speech, one term can cover all) & antiquity (including the Birth Narratives in the Gospels) argue for this usage. "She lost her baby" is a common way to state a miscarriage: what she aborted was anticipatorily a baby. Guttmacher is using not technical but ordinary speech: "a baby has been conceived": the fact that he's a scientist doesn't make that public statement lexically scientific.
5. Of course every abortion is a **killing**, just as is the picking of any flower. But an execution is never called a "killing" except by opponents of capital punishment. You never read "At midnight last night, the State of _____ killed _____." Likewise, an abortion is a "killing" only in the mouths of anti-abortionists. Why? Because the connotation is "(illegal) killing," viz **murder**. Again, you go off to bootcamp to learn to be a killer, but--since the killing is not the end but only the means--you don't call yourself that, nor does your society....The heaviness of the connotation appears in the Commandment "Thou shall not kill [ie murder, to which the Commandment is limited]."....The public understands enough sociology of language to feel-know that when a particular type or instance of causing death is called a "killing," the action is being prejudicially-rhetorically proscribed by the speaker-writer, who hopes the public is not sophisticated enough to know what's being pulled on it (or the speaker-writer is unaware, being victimized by sophisticates aware of the distinction & what they're doing).
6. The Cal.Med.Ass'n. is guilty of (to re-apply its phrase) "a curious avoidance of linguistic fact," that "killing" is inappropriate to legal abortion because the term is "socially abhorrent"--implying that what's so should not be legal.
7. "Child" has, in the abortion lexicon, about the same range of meaning as "baby." When in his decision on the Junior & Mary Sue Davis Case Judge W. Dale Young called the seven frozen embryos "children," he reduced a sublime reality--our awesome technological capability of stopping embryonic time--to the ridiculous. Ms. Davis, if she doesn't attempt to give birth to all seven, is guilty of child neglect!