

Abortion: Why This Issue?

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ABSTRACT: The reality of abortion in America is widely concealed by lies and half truths. The psychiatrist Scott Peck gives a striking portrait of individuals who want to conceal a bad choice by inventing a web of lies. His portrait is applied to America, seen as concealing from itself the reality of abortion. The article ends with suggestions of what college and university faculty can do.

WANDA FRANZ, then President of National Right to Life, was the final speaker at the second University Faculty for Life conference, held in 1992. She told of her preliminary research on a study showing that a large number of women were haunted by an abortion ten or twenty years after the fact. She told of having to abandon this research because of her recent election as President of National Right to Life. When she finished, John Griffith, then director of the Georgetown University Medical Center and a member of Board of University Faculty for Life, came running to me with eager enthusiasm. He saw a great opportunity for the Georgetown Medical School to continue this research, for we had the personnel and the NIH had millions of dollars set aside to study issues in women's health. He went on speaking with excitement on how he would conduct the research as we walked to our Board meeting. It seemed to be a fine idea and I said I would do whatever I could to help.

Six weeks later I had not heard from John, so I phoned and asked how the project was coming along. He told me that he had dropped it, for those at the NIH told him, not directly but in so many words, that there would be no grant for such research. They also strongly implied that if he continued to press the issue, the Georgetown University Medical Center would not receive any other NIH grant. Yes, that is what we are up against.

Shortly after talking on the phone with Dr. Griffith, a student came into my office and asked about my involvement in UFL. She knew that I

was concerned about many issues (capital punishment, the environment, gun control, and so forth) and asked why I invested so much time and effort in opposing abortion. In short, "Abortion! Why this issue?" Without reflecting, I answered, "Because I cannot stand the lying, the cover up, and the deceit." I could have given other reasons, but the lying gets to me in a special way. Perhaps it is because I am a professor, and lies and cover-ups are particularly offensive. We might recall that Naomi Wolf, who identifies herself as pro-choice, saw advocates of abortion rights as entangled "in a series of self-delusions, fibs, and evasions."¹ She noted that "the A word" is being avoided when law-makers and UN-sponsored symposia refer to "reproductive health procedures" and "services for pregnant women." She asked how we could refuse to publish pictures of aborted fetuses when the pictures are true. I agree, and I am bothered by the "self-delusions, fibs, and evasions." Both the unwillingness of the NIH to look into the matter and the unwillingness of others to name what is involved show a culture unwilling to know itself.

¹ Naomi Wolf, "Rethinking Pro-Choice Rhetoric: Our Bodies, Our Souls," *The New Republic* 213 (Oct. 16, 1995): 26.

Bernard Nathanson tells of his work before *Roe v. Wade* in founding NARAL and making up the claim of 5,000 to 10,000 annual deaths from illegal abortions. "We knew the figures were totally false,"² he admits. Norma Jean McCorvey and her attorney Faye Wattleton knew that her pregnancy had not resulted from rape, but that is how it was presented to the Supreme Court. *Roe v. Wade* itself made many questionable assertions. For example, it stated there was strong public support for claiming that human life begins at birth. A poll in 1977 found support for this view to come from only 8% of Americans.³ But pollsters themselves go along with the deceit. In the 13 polls on the subject conducted by Louis Harris, Harris pollsters first inform the one being interviewed that *Roe v. Wade* allows an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy, and then ask them if they agree with *Roe v. Wade*. In fact, *Roe v. Wade* allows abortion for the first *six* months and effectively through nine months and during the time of delivery. But telling people the truth would show that Americans are not as happy about abortion as we are supposed to be. *The New York Times* and *USA Today* have cooperated in refusing to run some pro-life ads (even ads without garish pictures). An article in *The National Review* told of 261 professional historians signing an *amicus curiae* brief to the Supreme

² Bernard Nathanson, *Aborting America* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1979).

³ Raymond J. Adamek, Ph.D. *Thirty Plus Years of Abortion Polls: What Have We Learned?* (Ad Hoc Committee in Defense of Life, 215 Lexington Ave., NY NY 10016, 2002), p. 22.

Court that centered on a largely bogus history of abortion in America.⁴

But the most notable deception was that of Ron Fitzsimmons, then Executive Director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers, who claimed on national television that partial-birth abortion was used only on women whose lives were in danger or whose fetus was badly deformed. A year later he confessed, "I lied through my teeth," for the majority of partial-birth abortions are performed "on healthy women and healthy fetuses."⁵

⁴ *The National Review*, October 23, 1995; reprinted in *Human Life Review* (Winter 1996), p. 35.

⁵ *The New York Times*, February 26, 1997, A 11.

Many of our speakers at our UFL conferences over the years have pointed out various cases of fraud, silence, and truth-adjustments concerning abortion. I think of our conference in New York City where Dianne Irving told of attending a lecture by Clifford Grobstein on embryonic development, a subject that he had considered abundantly.⁶ When Grobstein finished speaking, Professor Irving got up and announced that there were several major flaws in his biology and gave a different account, an account that showed a more evident humanity in the embryo. Grobstein's response? "I was only trying to be helpful." Helpful for what? For concealing from us what we do not want to know?

Dr. Jack Willke told of the medical text books that he studied and that his father studied, texts that say that conception occurs with fertilization.⁷ But the texts that his daughter studied said that conception occurs with implantation. Is this some new medical breakthrough? No, it is just medical terminology being adjusted so that morning-after pills and inter-uterine devices can be called contraceptives not abortifacients. "Only trying to be helpful!"

William Brennan told of further vocabulary changes wherein pregnancies were termed "infections" and the occupant of the womb was termed a "parasite."⁸ At our meeting in Baltimore, Dr. Joel Brind told of his difficulties in publishing material showing a link between abortion and breast cancer; finally he was able to publish such articles in England. He told of NIH Conferences in which those supporting the link between abortion and breast cancer were not allowed to speak.⁹ In New

⁶ Dianne N. Irving, "Academic Fraud and Conceptual Transfer in Bioethics: Abortion, Human Embryo Research, and Psychiatric Research," in *Life and Learning IV: Proceedings of the Fourth UFL Conference at Fordham University* (Washington, D.C.: UFL, 1995), pp. 193-215.

⁷ John and Barbara Willke, "Why Can't We Love Them Both?" in *Life and Learning VII: Proceedings of the Seventh UFL Conference at Loyola College, June 1997* (Washington, D.C.: UFL, 1998), pp. 10-24.

⁸ William Brennan, "Confronting the Language of the Culture of Death," in *Life and Learning VI: Proceedings of the Sixth UFL Conference at Georgetown University, June 1996* (Washington, D.C.: UFL, 1997), pp. 301-22.

⁹ Joel Brind, M.D., "Abortion, Breast Cancer, and Ideology," in *Life and*

Haven we had Jorge Garcia tell of an article defending a woman's right not to know. That is right! The woman has a right to make the choice and a right to remain ignorant about what she is choosing.

On our college and university campuses abortion is a hushed issue. Yes, there are Right to Life groups and Pro-Choice groups that hold rallies, demonstrate, and distribute materials. Yet there is all but no discussion of what abortion involves. One university told of over three hundred students having pregnancy tests that came up positive; yet it seems that only six of the pregnancies resulted in a live birth. This quietly continues on many a campus: a distraught girl is unwilling to tell her parents of her pregnancy and slips away (often with boyfriend or girlfriend) and has "things taken care of." She returns to campus and tries to look her usual self. But are things the same? What long term effects will it have on her, on her marriage, on her ability to bear another child, her ability to love that child? The NIH does not think that this an issue in women's health.

I have been much impressed by a book by Scott Peck, the psychiatrist best known for his runaway bestseller, *The Road Less Traveled*.¹⁰ When working on a later book, Peck had himself baptized as a non-denominational Christian. In the later book, *People of the Lie*,¹¹ Peck tells abundantly of people given to self-deceit and wilful ignorance, the "People of the Lie." He tells of times when he was listening to a patient and wanted to get up and leave the room. For in the room his ability to think was cramped; in listening sympathetically he had picked up the cramp in the mind of his patient. He sees such people as aware of a wrong that they have done and since then have twisted their whole world to cover it up; they know and they would like to avoid what they know. He sees them as suppressing the life of those around them, particularly the life of their children.

¹⁰ M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values, and Spiritual Growth* (New York NY: Simon & Schuster, 1978).

¹¹ M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York NY: Simon & Schuster, 1983).

Meanwhile, many of these are church-going people with an image of their own righteousness; he likens them to the Pharisees criticized so severely in the Gospels. He says that they live in terror buried in layers of deceit. To describe such people he quotes Martin Buber speaking of people who were engaged in “the uncanny game of hide and seek in the obscurity of the soul, in which it, the human soul, avoids itself, hides from itself.”¹² According to Peck, it all goes back to a personal choice, a choice usually made at a time of desperation, and a choice they want to conceal.

Peck’s book uses many vivid accounts to tell us what it is to live a cover-up. He speaks of individuals. But what if a whole culture practices the cover-up? We have heard of the culture of life and the culture of death, but in the U.S. today the culture of death could well be called the culture of the lie. Others have pointed out that death itself is concealed in our culture. I think of Ernest Becker’s *The Denial of Death*.¹³ I see a whole culture engaged in the cover-up of abortion. Hundreds of people are lying, and others only “trying to be helpful” so that we do not have to face what we are doing. And it all goes back to a choice. Our culture has made a decision. The high-culture of America has quietly made a choice, and it does not want to face what it has chosen. To adapt a phrase from Scott Peck, the high culture of America is aware of this wrong and yet desperately wants to avoid the awareness. To adapt a phrase of Martin Buber, there is an uncanny game of hide-and-seek going on in the obscurity of the nation’s soul.

Today we find ourselves in departments largely composed of decent people, people who favor a woman’s right to choose to have an abortion and who do not want to discuss the issue. I suggest that if we try to confront them, we will not be confronting an individual at all, but a culture—the high culture, the intelligentsia of America. All cultures

¹² Ibid., p. 107.

¹³ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York NY: Free Press, 1973).

demand conformity. So, where does that leave us who want to change the culture? I would suggest three things:

(1) The Feminists for Life have made themselves a disturbing presence because they break the image of what feminists are supposed to think. Likewise, the University Faculty for Life breaks the image of what intellectuals are supposed to think. I know that in the fifteen years of our existence the only secular press that has been willing to acknowledge us has been *The Village Voice*. But we have been covered in major right-to-life journals and we have spoken at the annual March for Life. Thus, large numbers of those working for life know of our work and are encouraged by an academic presence.

(2) UFL. In doing research and in attending and speaking at UFL Conferences, whose proceedings are sent to hundreds of college and university libraries, we are doing what no other organization in America is doing. It is important work, and all who attend these Conferences are becoming aware of the many dimensions of the issue. Stick with us. The research is accumulating and we are learning how to address the issue in a university setting.

(3) Our students have not yet bought into the high culture as much as our colleagues have. In the academy we have an incredible opportunity to address the young folk who will set the culture of tomorrow. I have found students willing to change their minds on the issue, for they have not yet bought in to America's high culture. They are more willing to consider the evidence than are our colleagues. Speak out on your own campus. Often Right to Life groups bring in noted figures to campus to speak. That is fine, but each of you is already a noted figure on campus. And students do listen, even when they disagree. Students admire courage. Now it is called for.