

Is Abortion Really the Lesser of Two Evils?

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While it doesn't occur often, there is a thread of moral conscience sometimes visible within the abortion rights movement. Recently that thread stood out starkly against the camouflage fabric of abortion rights rhetoric: an advocate of abortion rights urged that her fellow word weavers should admit that abortion is killing a human being. Writing in the [Times of London](#), regular columnist Antonia Senior argued that a woman's right to reproductive choice, including abortion, is a higher right than a fetus's right to life, not because a fetus is not a human being, but because its life is not as important as its mother's right to choose to kill it! In [Yes, Abortion Is Killing. But It's the Lesser Evil](#), Senior challenged, "If you are willing to die for a cause, you must be prepared to kill for it, too" (30 June 2010).

Senior recounts that she didn't always hold the view that abortion was killing a human being. What changed her mind, she says, is that she became a mother herself & knew that what was growing within her, the infant daughter she gave birth to, the toddler she is parenting, was a separate human individual. "My daughter was formed at conception, and all the barely understood alchemy that turned the happy accident of that particular sperm meeting that particular egg into my darling, personality-packed toddler took place at that moment. She is so unmistakably herself, her own person — forged in my womb, not by my mothering."

But this experience did not change Senior's support of abortion rights. In fact, she argues that feminism cannot be separated from absolute reproductive rights: "But you cannot separate women's rights from their right to fertility control. The single biggest factor in women's liberation was our newly found ability to impose our will on our biology." Senior believes, therefore, that the only way to preserve female freedom is to choose the "lesser evil" of abortion over the "greater evil" of limiting a woman's right to kill her unborn child.

That there are huge logical stumbling blocks in Senior's argument is unquestionable. Pacifism, the ethical view that one will not participate in violence, much less killing, against other humans, has a strong tradition among a variety of worldviews, especially some Christian theology, like that of the Mennonites & Quakers. Jesus himself was willing to die for the sins of the world while he prevented his disciples from using force to defend him. The ethical view promoted by Senior, popularized in Joseph Fletcher's situational ethics, of "choosing the lesser evil," has been soundly refuted from a variety of philosophical perspectives. And even if "choosing the lesser evil" were a legitimate standard of ethics, Senior has presented no argument that intentionally killing one's own defenseless child is a "lesser evil" than preventing a woman from that act.

I believe this article will have a similar importance in the debate about abortion as did "[Our Bodies, Our Souls](#)," a [New Republic](#) article by author Naomi Wolf (October 16, 1995), in which Wolf argued that abortion was the deliberate killing of a human being & as such carried with it varying degrees of moral guilt, although Wolf continued to insist that the right to abortion was morally defensible. Wolf's article has been a powerful tool in persuading abortion rights advocates to rethink their position. I personally know women who became pro-life supporters partly through the influence of Wolf's article.

Because I think this commentary by Antonia Senior is similarly important, I urge you to read it through, carefully (It is available from the Times of London for a fee, or other places free. Google the article title & author's name for where you can access it.) Be prepared to use it in discussion with others, especially with abortion rights advocates who demonstrate thoughtful compassion & therefore might be open to some of Senior's observations. That Senior would argue that abortion rights are more sacred than one's own unborn child's life sickens me. That she is willing to admit to this, & that her observations can challenge the double-speak of the abortion rights position, is

invaluable.