

Splendor of Truth: Political Double-Speak on Abortion

In the recent political campaign for the nomination of both the Republican and Democratic Party, leading candidates use language when explaining their view on abortion which defies both logic and morality—a vocabulary Americans regard as unacceptable on other issues; a manner of speech even a first-grader can ridicule.

Each of the current leading candidates in both parties—Rudy Giuliani, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama—have stated they are “personally opposed” to abortion but nonetheless respect a woman’s right to choose. They maintain giving birth is a deeply personal choice which the state has no business and no right to prohibit: this is a decision a woman must make in consultation with her doctor, her family, her minister and her god. When expressing their viewpoint, the candidates usually adopt an expression of deep pain and concern—an attempt to demonstrate how kind, compassionate and sensitive they are to this feminine plight. Their tone connotes abortion is indeed a tragedy, both for the pregnant woman and for the life that will not come to fruition—but that, nonetheless, every woman must muddle through her own misfortune.

Yet, what does it mean, exactly, to be “personally opposed” to a specific practice. If I am “personally opposed” it means I believe the act is fundamentally wrong—why else would I be opposed? Notice how the terminology used is not one based on personal tastes and preferences such as “I dislike” or even based on personal moral convictions such as “I don’t approve.” Let’s take a few examples: I dislike spinach, but you are free to eat it; this makes sense. I don’t approve of lovers who live together and are not married, but you are free to do so; this also makes sense. Instead, to be “personally opposed” is to send a clear signal one believes the practice in question is fundamentally immoral, a vital transgression, and thus should not take place.

By the language used we understand that if Clinton, Obama and Giuliani had to make this choice for their family, they would “oppose” abortion and insist on the necessity of giving birth in order to prevent an even greater wrong. Yet, these leaders do not have the strength of character to maintain that if it is wrong for them personally, it is wrong for their neighbor and wrong for their country. Their position is akin to stating: I care for my soul and that of my family, but do not really care for yours.

Can you imagine if we substituted the word “slavery” for abortion and a candidate declared: “I am personally opposed to slavery, but each slaveholder has to decide for himself.” Or “I am personally opposed to drunk drivers, but each drunk has to decide for himself before driving.” Indeed, common sense tells us slaveholders and drunk drivers hurt others and this is why the state must legislate. The victims of slaveholders and drunk drivers have spoken loudly and clearly and have asked for help. If only the victims of abortion could speak—then the absurdity of this languid pro-choice position would be crystal clear.

Let’s now test this terminology in a regular household where parents make decisions for those who cannot yet fully think or speak for themselves. Can you imagine a parent telling a child “I am personally opposed to you not doing your homework, but you have to decide for yourself.” Or, in teenage years: “I am personally opposed to you doing drugs, but you have to decide for yourself.” When adults assume responsibility for those not yet fully able to care for themselves, they declare simply: “This is right and this is wrong: you will do your homework; you won’t do drugs.” In short, they take a clear and unequivocal stand on a matter of principle.

Pro-choice activists, who maintain abortion is not murder, is a perfectly legitimate form of contraception and the state should therefore mind its own business, make a logical and consistent argument. But the wishy-washy, muddle-brained candidates who declare “I am personally opposed” but the state should nonetheless make it legal to abort, reveal they do not have the courage of their convictions: they cannot think straight, they cannot lead.

At the heart of this dilemma is the ever-present snare of moral relativism: it might be wrong for me but may be right for you. We do not need a philosophical treatise to explode this argument for we have already witnessed the practical results of this line of thought: it always creates multi-tiered classes of citizens. The Nazis too began their campaign for a new social order by crushing the life of the mentally ill and the disabled—those who could not speak for themselves, who could not defend themselves. They subsequently proceeded to exterminate Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, Slavs and other Europeans: these groups were perceived as second-class subjects; they had no rights because they were deemed not fully human.

The fundamental question we face in America is: Are we all equal or not when it comes to moral and legal principles? I maintain we are and thus, if I am personally opposed to abortion, I also want it to be illegal. This is not a question of vice or

virtue; it is a matter of equal rights and justice for all—even for those who are too tiny and too innocent to raise their arms in self-defense.

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