

ARTICLES

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SERVICEMorality and
Abortion

by Matthew Royal

One million, six hundred thousand. That's how many abortions occur every year in this country.

One million, six hundred thousand. That's about equal to the population of Houston. That's greater than the number of people who live in the city of Philadelphia.

Why are so many abortions performed? Are they really justified?

Is abortion, especially abortion-on-demand, an acceptable alternative to birth?

Our philosophy regarding abortion in this country is basically split into two extreme schools of thought: One position assumes that a woman's "right" to abortion is absolute, and that abortion is no different from any other extractive surgical procedure. Supporters of the other prevalent opinion claim that abortion is, in a moral sense, murder, and that the unborn's right to life is absolute.

If we are to be morally upright and consistent in our morality, we cannot accept abortion-on-demand.

For most of us, the foundation of our moral reasoning is the Golden Rule. An accurate paraphrase of this principle is, "Do unto others only as you would consent to have them do unto you in similar circumstances."

Given this rule, let us consider abortion in a moral context.

It is generally understood that, regardless of one's opinions about abortion, that the unborn fetus, if allowed to be born, will become a living, breathing human being under normal circumstances.

In order, then, for one to have a reasonable level of self-preservation and still support abortion-on-demand, one must be able to answer questions as follows:

Do you consent to the idea of my ending your life now? No.
Do you consent to the idea of my ending your life yesterday? No.

... when you were five years old? No.

... when you were one day old? No.
Do you now consent to the idea of my not allowing you to ever draw breath? Yes!

(Baird & Rosenbaum, *The Ethics of Abortion.*)

Obviously, such a series of questions is rarely presented to one who is debating abortion — because it points out that in order to support abortion-on-demand, one cannot be consistent!

One issue that is often debated is the question of just when human life begins. In the 1973 US Supreme Court decision *Roe v Wade*, Justice Blackmun, who delivered the majority opinion, declined to settle the issue of just when life begins. (In fact, *Roe v Wade* legalized abortion on the federal level up to and including the day of birth.)

Can anything be almost alive? "Life" is viewed by most as absolute, and not an abstract concept. Yet how is "life" determined? Some choose to define "life" in the womb as beginning at the first heartbeat; others, at the first brain activity. In reality,

it is difficult to define when these events occur.

A child's (or "fetus", if you prefer) heart does not suddenly begin to beat. The heart must slowly form and gradually become capable of pumping blood. A developing brain does not instantly begin to reason and process information; the synapses must close, nerve endings must form, and the circuitry of the mind gradually begins to operate.

Why is this important? Just as the foundation of much of our morality is the Golden Rule, the ultimate "right" we possess is the right to live. Without this right, all others are meaningless — corpses cannot exercise any rights. If we are to respect any right, then, we must first respect the right to live. In order to respect the right to live, then, we must agree on the point at which life begins. The only sudden change in the state of a pregnancy, besides birth, is conception.

If the right to live begins at conception (and there is no other point at which it can), then a woman cannot have a right to abortion — a right, in essence, to violate the right to live. Justice Blackmun's reasoning in *Roe v Wade* was faulty; he placed abortion among the situations encompassed by a right to privacy, completely overlooking a much more fundamental right.

Desiree Did It Right

by Matthew Royal

The successful prosecution in a court of law of Mike Tyson's rape of Desiree Washington should show modern feminists the proper way to pursue those accused of rape or sexual harassment.

Anita Hill, by contrast, showed just the opposite of propriety in her allegations against now-Justice Clarence Thomas. Hill had no evidence; assuming the allegations were founded in fact, she waited an unreasonable period of time to bring forth those allegations; and there seems to be a substantial conflict of interest: Anita Hill is now making speeches all over the country at ten thousand dollars a speech.

The real dichotomy here lies in the assumptions that have been made in each instance. Desiree Washington legitimately took Tyson to task in an Indiana criminal court, where the liberties enumerated under the Indiana constitution granted Tyson the legal presumption of innocence: Innocent until Proven Guilty.

But what about "Hill v Thomas"? Here are how some of our country's most visible senators commented on the hearings:

"A man should not be on the Supreme Court with doubts about his truthfulness." — Senator Alan Cranston (D-CA).

"The Senate should give the benefit of the doubt to the Supreme Court and the American people, not to Thomas." — Senator Edward ("Teddy") Kennedy (D-MA).

Sorry, folks, but that's not how it works in a free republic! Ted Kennedy, of all people, should realize that the accused — not the accuser — must be given the

benefit of the doubt in order for justice to be served. And, in the American system, it is not the responsibility of the accused to prove himself innocent, but rather that of the accuser to prove the accused guilty beyond any reasonable doubt. Cranston's comment, then, goes against the principles this country is founded upon.

Had Hill wanted a legitimate triumph over Thomas, she would have — long ago — pressed charges in the style of Desiree Washington. Hill should have brought evidence (if she had any), pointed out conflicts in Thomas' testimony (if such conflict existed), and done it all in a court of law, in front of a judge and jury, where order and the presumption of innocence could be maintained.

What I see happening in this country today reminds me of a much-lamented situation that endured in the 1950's. Does the name McCarthy ring a bell?

For a number of years, all one had to do to ruin another's career, or to be honest, his entire life was to utter one word of accusation.

Communist.

If one was accused of being a Communist or a Communist sympathizer, no evidence was needed, no testimony was expected. Only the accusation mattered. Pink slips were issued. Marriages were destroyed. References suddenly disappeared. Today, this curse has been slowly and explicitly replaced by two words of accusation.

The first, though not completely analogous, is *racist*.

The second, more appropriate analogy: *sexist*.

Once Anita Hill came forward, the world seemed to immediately assume that Clarence Thomas is a sexist pig whose only goal in life is to humiliate women. After all, why would Hill lie? (She didn't intend for her name to go public at first.) What did she have to gain? (Revenge, maybe? Or — ultimately — ten thousand dollars a speech.) Yet Anita Hill never presented any evidence. Her claims could not be verified. Everything she said went against Thomas' established reputation.

By contrast, Desiree Washington backed up her claims. While she admittedly did not have a wealth of hard evidence, she did not rely completely on her own testimony. Washington brought in others who could testify to a lewd and disrespectful Mike Tyson, therefore backing up her claims about his unsavory reputation. In court, Tyson contradicted himself, made unreasonable claims, and generally presented himself as an utter fool. Yes, the Washington/Tyson trial was essentially "her word against his," but Miss Washington ensured that her words were accepted far more readily than Tyson's.

Women who believe they have been victims of harassment or rape should look toward and emulate Desiree Washington's example rather than that of Anita Hill.