

‘Good’ Abortions, ‘Bad’ Abortions and the Battle for Honesty and Charity

I was paging through Megan McArdle’s blog (she’s apparently transitioning from The Daily Beast to Bloomberg View) and ran across this brief post asking, “Why are all of the essays on abortion so sad?”

It begins, “Jessica Grose, a writer who I like very much, says that pro-choicers shouldn’t just publish essays about ‘good abortions’—those had by people who are very young, or clearly too financially and personally unstable to raise a child, or carrying a fetus that will not live long past birth. They’re leaving out the majority of abortions, which are not had by frightened teenagers or heartbroken mothers terminating an unviable pregnancy.

“The question, of course, is whether you want to comfort the women having the abortions, or the people considering how many restrictions we want to place on **abortion**. Most Americans don’t approve of having an abortion because you’re really hoping for a promotion next month, unless (maybe) that promotion is out of a minimum wage job. They don’t care if you want to travel for a few years before you settle down to raising kids. If you write essays defending choices like that, you are going to repulse some number of people who currently weakly support legal abortion.”

She continues, “I’d say that on average, the American public is tacitly okay with ‘good abortions.’ They’re even willing to tolerate some ‘bad abortions’—those had for convenience, or by women who are careless with birth control—because they understand that it is impossible to completely separate the good from the bad. But they are not okay with abortion as the

pro-choice movement sees it, which is that right up to the point where the baby is born, you ought to be able to terminate the pregnancy for any reason. They do not believe that this is a decision which only involves a woman and her doctor. They also care about the fetus.”

While I wish the American public were more committed to life, I think McArdle is largely right. Americans tend to be reluctant to “force” women into difficult circumstances but are broadly unsympathetic to abortions for convenience—thus the backlash you often see even from pro-choice advocates when people admit, for example, to killing their child to preserve a short-lived pro volleyball career. That’s dirty laundry that simply shouldn’t be aired in public.

While of course the **pro-life** movement should shine sunlight on the reality of the vast majority of abortions, honesty alone simply isn’t enough.

McArdle states that it is “impossible to completely separate the good [abortions] from the bad,” and—legally—she is largely right. Government can’t possibly construct a screening mechanism that separates “good” (i.e., publicly supported because of the mother’s acknowledged difficulties) abortions from the “bad,” nor would the pro-life movement ever support such a regime. The pro-life answer is to match our honesty about abortion with charity toward mothers in crisis, to ameliorate as best we can the pressures and difficulties that lead to the “bad” abortions.

But here’s where the extreme pro-abortion Left is perhaps most pernicious, recognizing the danger to its radical vision of sexual liberty when their opponents don’t conform to absurd caricatures of intolerant fundamentalists. The old slander—that pro-lifers only care about babies in the womb and not mothers or older children—is giving way to a frontal attack on acts of support and charity for mothers and children.

At the American Center for Law and Justice, we're currently defending pro-life crisis-pregnancy centers from local ordinances designed to suppress and change the centers' pro-life message, and I've written recently about the emerging (and reprehensible) left-wing backlash against evangelical adoption. In other words, we're falsely attacked for not caring, then attacked when we do care.

The screaming "Hail, Satan" protesters in Texas have built an industry on a foundation of lies—lies about abortion as practiced and lies about the character and nature of their pro-life opponents.

While every nation is beset by its share of deceptive extremists, the real shame is that America's pro-abortion radicals are disproportionately clustered in the mainstream media and popular culture, giving them the power to protect their fellow citizens from dangerous truths.

David French is a senior counsel at the American Center for Law and Justice. This article is crossposted at National Review Online.