

Another Truth about Late-Term abortion



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In the interests of the case being argued, I would like to offer an alternative viewpoint to [Jessica Valenti](#)'s piece [here](#). The modern abortion debate seems to use as its locus some conception of the individual woman's right to choose as the primary ethical issue, a woman has absolute autonomy over the reproductive function of her body. Now such a narrow conception I believe just misses the real ethical issues at the heart of abortion — the status of unborn human being and whether they have any rights (most medical ethics textbooks would agree with me) — I argued this at great length [here](#) so will not do so again other than to reiterate the force of the conclusions that this is not so much about *denying rights* to a woman but rather *ensuring rights* for unborn human beings — civilisation is the balancing of our competing rights; but also bearing in mind that the vast majority of abortions worldwide are of *female* babies and so I am actually passionate about women's rights too.

The primary ethical issue is **always** *personhood*-the worldwide campaign for veganism at the moment appropriates rights as we grant personhood:



Ethical philosopher Peter Singer in his 1979 book “Animal Rights” was keen to assert the personhood of species other than humans and thus to strengthen their rights to not be exploited and eaten by humans. This book was credited with establishing the modern animal rights movement.

*My obvious rhetorical point is that if we grant animals (including their unborn) rights on the basis of their personhood, how much more should we grant human babies the same rights — in fact we do, once they are **outside** of the womb and in many other cases (rather ironically considering my motivation for writing this article), affording them protection **inside** the womb in a host of other cases. In most jurisdictions it is first degree murder to kill a child during an assault either inside or outside of the womb — though it is notable that the New York State legislation (cheered by the lawmakers) has seemingly **removed** that protection from children in the womb in a [report](#) on a domestic violence case on Feb 3:*

“The Queens District Attorney announced that he could only bring one murder charge (for the mother) because the January 22 law had removed *every type* of abortion from New York’s criminal code. [Her unborn baby no longer had legal protection.](#)”

The controversy around the Virginia governor’s comments are another reflection of the attempt to *establish the utilitarian principle* that a child’s life is not valuable because it is a life in itself but because of some other “value” (often dressed up in medical-ese as “quality of life”) that society, doctors or parents attach to it:

<https://twitter.com/CalebJHull/status/1090711265415217156/photo/1>

Imagine the extension of that principle to the elderly, the sick, the disabled, ethnic minorities, criminals...get three physicians to agree and you can terminate...

In the US and now being argued in the UK by the head of BPAS (British Pregnancy Advisory Service) the status of a child outside the womb is now becoming increasingly ambiguous in the cases of unsuccessful abortions where the baby is born alive. A [single Democrat in the American senate](#) objected to a unanimous consent bill that was designed to explicitly deal with this scenario.

Now whatever you might argue about first trimester abortions and whether a foetus is not a person until it is “viable outside of the womb” (babies have survived and thrived into childhood born at [21 weeks](#); 20–22 is considered a medically semi-viable period) there is really no argument about the personhood of the unborn child in the third trimester.

Late trimester abortion is not medical abortion as commonly understood — you do not liquify or suck out the “foetus” (that *depersonalising* term) as in a traditional abortion. The child is rather injected into their brain or their torso with a toxic dose of a poison or sedative and they are expected to die. The mother then carries the child for a day and an ultrasound is undertaken to ensure the baby really is dead in the womb and birth is then induced.

That is what is being celebrated as enhancing the rights of women.

Yet, surely only the most brutal of utilitarians would argue that we can justify killing the innocent unborn in such a ruthless manner even if we dress it up with some self-justifying emotional language, e.g. the baby might be unwanted, the woman might be mentally distressed or there is some kind of medical risk to either baby or mother. These just sidestep the emotionally difficult but important ethical issues of what justice is owed to an *innocent* human in the womb (since when are

the *ethical* choices, what we *ought* to do rather than what would *suit us* in our autonomy, without psychological difficulty?), but it seems our “liberal” (a misnomer if ever there was one) politicians are lining up to deny basic human rights to the most vulnerable members of our society.



In my dream of a perfect world, the British would care more for babies than their legendary care for animals