

Common Sense Should Rule Debate

Victims of 'partial-birth' abortion sure look like babies

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ONCE AGAIN, "PARTIAL-BIRTH" abortion is in the news. At issue is the constitutionality of an Ohio law banning the procedure. In September, U.S. District Judge Walter H. Rice ruled that the law has a "substantial likelihood" of being unconstitutional, repeating the reasoning he used to overrule a similar law in 1995.

In the words of Robert Bork, the court may not allow a ban of "a practice so close to infanticide as to be logically indistinguishable." Michael M. Uhlmann has called this medical procedure "constitutionally sanctioned homicide."

How have we come to this end?

Dr. Martin Haskell has argued, in testimony, that the procedure should be retained for the sake of the mother's health. This is in spite of abundant testimony (and that of the American Medical Association) that the procedure is never necessary.

It is natural for us to be troubled by such a legal impasse. I believe human life begins at conception and that it is sacred and should be protected. However, I concede that there are those in this pluralistic society who do not share my theological and moral beliefs. Yet it is one thing to debate the humanity of a tiny embryo. It is quite another when it comes to a 20-week-old fetus.

By then, it sure looks like a baby.

Let us be clear on one thing: "Partial-birth" abortion is designed to end the life of a late-term fetus, which, if delivered by natural means, would surely be called a "baby." And modern technology has made the survival of such premature infants a common possibility. It simply has to survive its time in the womb, unless it encounters an outside deadly force.

This conclusion doesn't require recourse to theology or religion. It just requires common sense. The English philosopher John Locke once proposed that common sense could guide the destiny of nations. He called such rational thought "natural law."

Whether you call it common sense or natural law, it sure looks like a baby.

Such common sense is seen in the woman who undergoes an ultrasound examination in the later stages of pregnancy. Imagine her saying, "Doctor, is my fetus healthy?" Or, "Is this a male fetus or a female fetus?" Surely not! No, she will ask, "How is my baby?" And, "Is it a boy or a girl?"

In the September hearing, Haskell defended “partial-birth” abortion before the court, claiming that it “facilitates an autopsy and allows the parents to hold the fetus or provide a funeral.” Isn’t it curious that he would deny personhood to such life in the womb but would finally treat it as a person after destroying it?

It all comes down to a question of geography. Personhood is granted based on position, i.e., whether in the womb or out of it.

As Douglas Johnson testified before a joint congressional hearing on “partial-birth” abortion, “The abortionist must take care that he does not dilate the cervix a little too much, because if he did so, the head could slip across the Supreme Court’s constitutional ‘line of personhood.’ That must not happen until after the surgical scissors and the suction machine have done their deadly work.”

So close to being a person, yet so far away. Whether in the womb or out of it, it sure looks like a baby.

Ultimately, if we cannot or will not outlaw “partial-birth” abortion, we have cheapened human life. With a cruel, painful and dehumanizing procedure, we mostly give birth to a living being, then we extinguish her life at the last moment. All this so we don’t have to admit what common sense tells us is abundantly obvious.