

# Abortion & the Morality Wars: Taking the Moral Offensive

A talk by **Diana Alstad** at the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL - San Francisco, fall 1997) **Joel Kramer** is co-author of this position paper.

***Dagmar Dolby's Introduction:** Diana took an active part in the battle for legal abortion while getting a doctorate at Yale in the late 60's. She taught the first Women's Studies courses at Yale and Duke, and has been in the Bay Area since 1974. She is the co-author with Joel Kramer of The Guru Papers: Masks of Authoritarian Power on cultural, religious and moral authoritarianism—a book that decodes social and spiritual control. It should be interesting to hear what Diana can tell us about those who are so fervently opposing our right to choose.*

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I'm pleased to be here to discuss why I think access to abortion has been seriously eroded and our right to abortion threatened, and how we can change this. Although I'll be addressing how to persuade the uncertain, my aim is primarily to give people who are already clearly pro-choice more powerful justifications. I'm not proposing a political strategy, as I'm not holding back what I really think for political expediency. I do believe that a strategy needs to be developed to take the moral offensive. I suspect that most of you will agree with some of these ideas, but perhaps not all. I welcome your comments. I offer these thoughts not as fixed in stone, but rather as a way of enriching the dialogue needed to present a more powerful moral stance.

Since January 1998 is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, it's a good time to look at where we are and where we want to be. It was Roe v. Wade that politically galvanized the religious right in the first place. They later decided to use the abortion issue as a wedge to push their whole so-called moral agenda because they could capitalize on the stigma already on abortion to gain the moral offensive.

I was one of the early feminists who crusaded for the right to abortion. At that time, we had the zeal and energy of the moral offensive because we were fighting against barbaric laws for our freedom and for women's very lives. Now many people have forgotten that before Roe v. Wade women were often the tragic victims of coat hanger deaths and botched illegal hack abortions. An entire generation of young women who have taken the right to abortion for granted have also been told abortion is morally wrong their whole life. In order to ignite support and enthusiasm we need to show that abortion should not be taken for granted and that it is not morally wrong. The reactionary element has shifted the focus away from women's plight, shutting women out of the picture by making zygotes (fertilized cells), embryos, and fetuses the new victims. I'd like to show how they succeeded in doing this and what I think their real agenda is.

The abortion debate is an example of a planetary phenomenon that I call the "morality wars" or the "morals wars." This worldwide battle for people's minds is between fundamentalists and modern people over basic values. The real issue is "Who has the right to decide what's right?" including what justifies it, and most importantly, what process should be used to establish what is right. On one side there's an old authoritarian morality whose basic concern is obedience to the perceived dictates of a strict, often vengeful God. The key element here is forcing obedience and punishing transgression. On the other side are those whose primary concerns are the well-being of living people, fairness, and the future viability of the planet and its inhabitants. This is admittedly a somewhat black and white picture of the two sides--but fundamentalism reduces a complex world to black and white formulas.

We pro-choice people have mainly focused on legal and constitutional rights as our strategy, while the reactionary religious right--I prefer to call them the "religious wrong"--has focused on moral issues, using

abortion to stake out their moral ground. They're gaining on us because they have defined the terms and issues, thus dominating the moral climate. Consequently, the media uses their rhetoric and frameworks, greatly amplifying their influence. This muddies the waters and creates discomfort, which makes people avoid thinking about the implications of both sides. So although the majority of Americans support choice, their support is often confused, ambivalent, and unenthusiastic. If people clearly understood the extraordinary importance of what's involved, the large potential support that's out there would be much stronger.

A problem we face is the social taboo against being critical of others' religions. Religious tolerance has meant respecting all religions, with an implicit taboo against criticizing them. Now that fundamentalists are attempting to force their religious morality on everyone by infiltrating politics and changing laws, this old view of tolerance muzzles us, but not them. They call us immoral and evil, and all we can do is defend ourselves or sound apologetic. A new definition of religious tolerance is needed, one that is not inherently disadvantageous to the more tolerant side--namely, us. To exempt religious values from being critiqued in the democratic marketplace of ideas handicaps us unfairly, for our most extreme opponents hold nothing back in attacking us--even violence and killing. This is not a viable position for us. If we think their values are harmful, we must speak out. Here is a more appropriate definition of religious tolerance: everyone is free to believe what they want, but one is also free to criticize others' beliefs, especially if the beliefs can be shown to be harmful. I not only think their beliefs about abortion are harmful to everyone, I also believe they are immoral.

To my mind, morality is about how people treat each other and what moves toward the good of society. This includes the quality of life and survival on our planet, tempering violence and reducing harm, making people's lives as fulfilling and free as possible--and perhaps most importantly, treating children with care as if they were indeed our most precious resource. This means fostering environments that provide children with love, nurturing, and the opportunity to be successful adults, which requires proper parenting. Consequently, choosing abortion to avoid having an unwanted child should be looked upon as a moral act, instead of a regrettable one. Bringing a child into the world that cannot be adequately cared for is what should be seen as truly regrettable. I view forcing any woman, no matter what her age, to have a child that she doesn't want or is unprepared to raise, as a totally immoral act in this day and age. And I see any ideologies or belief systems that put this forth as likewise immoral. It's immoral because it's harmful to women, to good parenting, to children, and to the very fabric of society.

Abortion wouldn't be an issue in the first place if it were not seen as morally wrong. This makes other types of justifications necessary. There are basically four types of justifications for abortion. One is legal and social rights, which includes personal freedom and privacy. The other three are health, family planning, and morality. The American pro-choice movement has focused on rights. We're now facing the unfortunate consequences of this because of the unexpected backlash. All rights exist only if society grants them. This makes rights vulnerable to being eroded whenever the social climate of moral opinion changes. The health justification places abortion in the hands of doctors, not women. Like rights, this access can also easily be diminished. And thanks to Reagan and the Pope, throughout the world the infrastructure of family planning that includes abortion has been severely damaged. We've been losing ground to the moral rhetoric and the resulting political clout of the religious right. I predict that we'll continue to do so as long as we rely mainly on legal, health, and family planning justifications. All three are dependent on the moral climate.

This is why I think the real battleground for abortion is morality. Morality is the most powerful justification of all because it is the broadest concept--the one that stands underneath all the others. Our side makes a strong moral case for social policy that promotes family planning and better parenting. This is important and necessary but not sufficient. We must also meet the opposition head on by challenging their depiction of abortion itself as immoral. Although our side does have moral justifications for the right to abortion, these are in the background and often not stated. We do say that abortion should be a woman's individual moral choice, but we do not put forth, in the foreground, a clearly defined moral perspective that justifies abortion by making a case for it being morally right. This alone would meet the fundamentalists' challenge that has defined the

territory and the rhetoric. I believe that until we demonstrate that abortion is not only morally right, but also that those who oppose it are morally wrong, we will remain on the defensive and we will not sway the middle or the media, or galvanize our potential support.

Abortion has become a focal point of the fundamentalist element all over the world because, unlike other issues that reveal their harshness, the “pro-life” verbiage gives them tremendous leverage. So much so, that they have chosen this issue as their lynchpin to make their stand and push their entire reactionary agenda. Because after all, who can back what they falsely label as "murdering babies?" Forcing their morality on the world, which includes keeping women prisoners of their biology and preventing movement toward equality between the sexes, is their real, not so hidden agenda.

### **WHO THEY ARE: Fundamentalists and Their Moral Framework**

All moralities are embedded in a worldview. The fundamentalist worldview is authoritarian as it is essentially geared at controlling people. (I define "authoritarian" in two interrelated ways: first, when any person or belief system is unchallengeable and thus closed to feedback; and second, when either purports to know what's best for everyone.) Their worldview instills self-mistrust and fear through such doctrines as original sin, hell and retribution, and salvation through belief in dogma. Fundamentalists also fear the change and uncertainty of the modern world. Fear makes people more susceptible to authoritarian ways of establishing control. When authoritarian beliefs, whether religious or communist, are backed by the force of the state, the combination is deadly.

Fundamentalism is geared at creating emotional certainty through belief; consequently, it is static and essentially unchanging. It's anti-evolutionary, ahistorical, and apocalyptic. As many fundamentalists fear the world is doomed, they're concerned primarily with their own salvation. So they're often indifferent to the worldly repercussions of their agenda or its potential harm. Since they believe they should obey a higher law than any secular law, the Constitution and human-defined human rights hold little sway with them. This is why fundamentalists and modernists are locked in a battle for people's minds.

In their world based on roles of dominance and submission, a woman's place in the scheme of things is secondary at best. Sacrifice is a key authoritarian virtue expected of both men and women in their separate spheres. While all are expected to obey what they believe are God's dictates and sacrifice this life for the next, the essence of women's role is dependency, surrender, and sacrifice. Women must sacrifice themselves for men and children--and now fetuses, embryos, and zygotes. A woman's main function is to be a biological vessel that brings souls into the world. The combination of rigid beliefs, fear, and deep dependency has the fundamentalist women themselves agreeing to their own submission. This outmoded view is patriarchal, unbending, and rule-bound. Historically, it fostered ruthlessness toward anything considered deviant.

Being apocalyptic and fearful, fundamentalists are focused on imminent doom and the Final Judgment. Abortion has become their modern crusade. For many, warring against abortion is a way of piling up credits to go to Heaven. Underneath the lofty veneer of "pro-life" language, their real values are obedience and punishment. This and their otherworldly focus explains their seeming inconsistencies. For instance, being anti-abortion and pro-capital punishment have in common that both are punishment—forced motherhood punishes women for sex out of wedlock and for breaking out of sex roles.

If they didn't have villainizing abortion as their moral camouflage, the rest of their destructive program would not have a moral leg to stand on. It's obvious that many so-called pro-lifers care little about life. The only life they seem to care fervently about lies in the womb. But their opposing prenatal care for these supposedly cherished fetuses unmasks their love of fetuses as one more deceit. This shows they're not really pro-fetus, let alone pro-life. Here are other revealing contradictions between their agenda and their rhetoric: they're uncaring about children's welfare after birth; they oppose programs to reduce America's alarmingly high rate of infant mortality; they're pushing to cut off all funding for family planning programs, which includes

contraceptive and health care and HIV testing. The outcome of these “pro-life” policies is that fetuses could have AIDS, be malnourished and unwanted. And if they survive, they often become hungry, neglected, abused, and angry children--but they would be able to pray in school for a better life.

In these times of accelerated change, this authoritarian worldview is harmful to deep survival issues, such as ecology, overpopulation, and the increasing gap between haves and have-nots which is a sure-fire formula for violence. Their “pro-life” stance has little to do with life, but everything to do with maintaining and promoting their power and control. It is ironic, though not amusing, that they claim to be against big government. Actually, they're only against government spending for social programs and against government control of guns, prayer, and child abuse. They're for more government control and spending in the areas they approve of, such as prisons, the military, and religious schools.

Such moralities foster what I call "ideological uncaringness," meaning that the followers care more about their beliefs than about people, the quality of life, or even life itself. Protecting an authoritarian system always takes precedence over the morality itself. The more certain one is that rules must be obeyed, the easier it is to sacrifice those who differ. The fact that some will engage in murder, deceit, and do anything to win is justified in the name of their ideology. Although killing abortion doctors and bombing clinics does not represent the majority of the religious right, historically, violence is right in line with their age-old tactics. And how many are secretly in complicity with it even now? I don't see them picketing their brethren to stop the killing and bombing. Even their morality has been two-faced in that it applies only to those within the flock and not to outsiders. For example, one of the 10 Commandments is "Thou shalt not kill," but historically "true believers" were eager to kill anyone who challenged them. It was "Onward Christian soldiers" during the Crusades, then the torture and executions of the Inquisition, later witch burnings, and now the Pope telling people not to use birth control or condoms in a time of overpopulation and AIDS. This is tantamount to asking his own followers to risk death. The willingness to protect a belief at all costs has always been one of the greatest sources of violence.

Current fundamentalist Christian child-rearing manuals all accept the premise that children are inherently sinful and defiant, and any questioning of authority must be answered with swift and painful punishment. Some of their most popular theorists promote systematically breaking a child's will through painful corporal punishment, even to the extent of giving exact recommendations on the increase of cane size for beatings as the child gets older. Prominent organizations, such as the Family Research Council, which set the conservative family values agenda, are pushing hard to stop funding social workers who investigate child abuse, ironically calling it an invasion of their privacy. Contrast this with our modern democratic family values of protection, care, nurturing, sexual equality, and family planning. The two sides continue to talk past each other without understanding because we live in two separate universes with really different values. Next time you hear them talk of protecting "family values," *remember their family values are not ours.*

## **WHY WE'RE ON THE MORAL DEFENSIVE**

In a perfect world, every pregnancy would be planned and every child wanted. Endless actions could and should be taken to improve the availability, use, and education around contraception and parenting. It's truly a national scandal that 60% of all pregnancies (over 3 million a year) and 8 out of 10 teenage pregnancies are unintended, with 30% ending in abortion. Moreover, funding for federal family planning programs has dropped by 60% in the last 15 years and the religious right is trying to end it altogether. America lags embarrassingly behind other developed countries in family planning and children's welfare, largely because the fundamentalists' shrill hegemony on moral rhetoric makes it political suicide to propose intelligent programs related to sexuality. But given our society's failings on this score, the real issue around abortion is that once an unwanted pregnancy occurs, should women be punished for the failings of society, or even the failings of their own judgment?

Our side has been operating out of the fear of alienating the large uncertain middle--most of whom are largely

for choice in some form. I think much of their discomfort stems from accepting the framework and language of the fundamentalists who dominate the climate of opinion. It's a mistake for us to be apologetic. This allows our opponents to capitalize on the stigma still attached to abortion. Instead, we need to combat the stigma.

For instance, calling abortion an "unfortunate necessity" contributes to the deep moral ambiguity and confusion surrounding it. A very important distinction needs to be made between the necessity of having an abortion and the fact that it is legally available. One can feel bad, sorry, or regretful that any woman ever has an unwanted pregnancy. One can also feel truly wonderful that safe abortions are legally available when wanted. Unfortunately, these two areas have become so emotionally confused that if I were to say that women should rejoice in the legal availability of abortion, many would see me as a cold, possibly immoral person. And yet, this is what I do feel. However imperfect a society may be, I view freeing women from the constraints of biology as wonderful, even if upsetting emotions may sometimes be involved. As we approach the year 2000, after eons of women dying from childbirth and weakness from bearing too many children, it's time to cast what moves us toward more freedom in a positive light. Abortion is like health care--we want it available and fervently hope we won't need it. No one in their right mind would say it's fortunate to need a heart transplant or an abortion. But if one does need one, it's very fortunate to be able to have a safe, legal one--both for oneself and for the world. The "religious wrong" has succeeded in conflating, that is fusing, these two totally distinct existential moments in a woman's life—distress over needing one and relief over having a safe one--thus turning our positive into their negative.

If abortion is the only way to guarantee that an unwanted child not be born, why should society scapegoat it and foster regret and guilt? Discomfort should be over society's failure rather than over the remedy for it. What is truly unfortunate is how unaware, unconcerned, unprepared, and unconscious our species is with its reproduction, and how little priority is given to ameliorating this. If society had devoted as much energy and resources to conscious conception and protecting women's inner space as it does to exploring outer space, there would be far fewer undesired pregnancies and unwanted children. Instead, women are triply penalized: by the trauma of unwanted pregnancies, by needing abortions, and finally by being stigmatized for it. True choice means non-stigmatized choice.

Abortion is commonly portrayed as a very difficult, painful choice and a regrettable, unfortunate act, implying that anyone who doesn't feel bad or at least conflicted about it is morally lacking. The opposition has so defined the language and values that even in a group like this, I'm hesitant to say what I really think. Presenting abortion in a positive light as an inherently moral act is almost taboo--although thankfully the taboo is being broken—as in *Abortion: A Positive Decision* by Patricia Lunneborg, and the seminal *Abortion and Woman's Choice* by Rosalind Petchesky which treats the abortion issue in great depth. They both cite a large body of research showing that, contrary to popular opinion, abortion is largely a positive and empowering psychological experience for women with little regret or depression involved. The most common feeling afterward by far is relief. Any negative emotions are usually short-term. I'm not suggesting this as a new emotional standard. Of course, there's no proper way to feel. Facing an abortion can be very upsetting. Mixed and changing emotions are natural. One can feel conflict, anxiety, and grief at having to have an abortion along with relief, and still feel wonderful about having the option. All emotions are legitimate, whether relief or grief.

Personally, I had an abortion in 1982, and it triggered many unexpected, short-lived emotions, both positive and negative. However, I felt really good about it--good about the decision being surprisingly easy and the operation smooth and civilized; about Planned Parenthood for making it available to so many; and gratified about having helped win the right to have one. I only wished it had been this way throughout history.

Here's another way that we've given up the moral terrain. How many of you have heard the phrase "Abortions are sometimes necessary, but shouldn't be used for birth control?" Obviously abortion is not only a form of birth control, it is the bottom line of birth control, *and this should never be forgotten*. Without abortion women do not have total, guaranteed birth control, and so do not have ultimate control over their lives. So the above statement must mean that ideally one should use other forms of birth control, and abortion should not be used casually. It's

here that I'd like to show how we have unwittingly bought into the opposition's authoritarian framework. Who is to decide what "casually" means, or what using abortion as birth control is? If a woman were to have many abortions, what does this really mean? That perhaps she is too poor or uneducated to invest in birth control, or too psychologically disturbed to care about her body? Or is it because it's the easiest thing for her to do--and if so, why? What does this say about society? It's feedback that society is missing the mark by not making sex education and inexpensive or free birth control readily available. This should be a top social priority. And here's the crucial point: *would a woman and society be better off if she didn't use abortion "casually" and had eight children casually instead?*

Saying that abortion should not be used as birth control wrongly lumps together two separate issues--birth control before pregnancy and birth control after pregnancy. Of course, society should aim to prevent unintended pregnancies, and ideally the best methods of preventing conception should be researched and promoted. This is a function of the public arena of social policy. But once pregnancy has occurred, should any woman be denied an abortion because she didn't use proper prevention? And what about pregnant women who realize they're not ready after all, and change their minds? The question is not should abortion be used as birth control; but rather, if a woman does have an unwanted pregnancy for whatever reason, should abortion be available? It's there to rectify mistakes, whether mistakes of technology or mistakes of judgment. Those who would limit abortion to certain cases should ask themselves whether a pregnant woman should be penalized for poor social policy or poor judgment. Does poor judgment make a woman fit to be a mother?

Moreover, given that the most effective birth controls--the pill and IUDs--are unfortunately not always safe, it's often better for a woman's health to use a less effective barrier method with abortion as a back-up. Otherwise women pay with their health for the lack of birth control research. Not to recognize abortion's value as a last resort and the bottom line of birth control is in effect to expect women to use less safe methods. The real issue is who defines what the proper or improper use of abortion is? In a country where many poor women, and young women in particular, don't have easy access either to birth control or proper sex education, who is to judge that any abortion is overused or casual, that is to say, morally improper? The overuse argument is specious because there is no one other than the woman herself who can determine what overuse is. The idea that if women were given free reign they would overuse abortion is unfounded and condescending, showing little concern for women's welfare or respect for their judgment. Because abortion is stressful, in the rare instances where a woman has many abortions, this largely stems from a lack of education or money or both. Should this be the criterion for limiting other women?

Let's say I'm a confused, anxiety-ridden, pregnant 15-year-old, and the reactionary right is telling me that if I abort, I'm an immoral murderess. What many counselors and pro-choice people say is that I'm facing a painful, regrettable decision. Whose argument has more power to sway me? Does the way this is framed help me overcome passivity, procrastination, distress, and denial so I can make an intelligent choice? When abortion is stigmatized, lacks a positive frame and social support, does this foster my freedom to choose? Does it give me a positive identity as a woman, based on feeling that society values my freedom and potential? Obviously it does not.

Requiring parental consent is also harmful. Saying a teenager is too young to make the decision but old enough to be a parent is ludicrous. If a girl isn't mature enough to decide not to have a child, how could she possibly be mature enough to raise one? Certainly raising a child requires infinitely more maturity than having an abortion. Does a 15-year-old mother also need parental consent on how to raise her child? Who then is to be the ultimate authority for the baby--its grandparents? Or does becoming a mother make her magically responsible and free from parental authority? To not look at complex implications beyond the womb is truly irresponsible. *If a girl is considered old enough to be a parent, then she must be at least old enough to decide whether to be one.*

We owe it to young women to protect their futures and development. But who is trying to convince young teens to terminate? This is another example of being gagged from telling the truth--perhaps even thinking it. Anti-

abortionists can beg, insult, deceive, harass, guilt-trip and use violence to convince a teenager to have a baby. Instead of saying, "You have to make a difficult decision," we should be presenting the vast and problematic implications of a child bringing a child into the world. Failure to do so is not sane. Might this not have prevented the tragic incidents of teen infanticide? The moral climate created by the fundamentalists greatly contributes to making abortion a hard decision for young teens. However upsetting it may be, for a 15-year-old to choose abortion over motherhood should not be a difficult choice. She needs to realize that choosing abortion can be morally right.

That many teenagers want babies for lack of other sources of respect, meaning, and love is a social problem. For a young teen to bring a baby into this complex and dangerous world is to be a mother unprepared and unequipped for the great challenge of raising a child. It handicaps her options and ability to develop so that she can be more prepared for life, and also for later motherhood should she so choose. The real moral outrage is that the "religious wrong" is keeping society from doing what it can to prevent children from having children. A sane and moral society would provide free or at least freely available contraception, sex education, pregnancy counseling discouraging unprepared parenting, and abortions when needed.

We are on the moral defensive because we have not articulated our position powerfully enough to blow through the opposition's rhetoric. We lose by default, giving too many concessions. To be truly free to choose, one needs a clear perspective of what the choice involves and what is moral. Our side is not offering what's needed to help pregnant women in conflict make their choice--a clear place to stand with moral strength.

Civilization is now in the midst of a momentous and difficult transition away from eons of women having had little control over their biology. The technology for choice exists, but not the social supports needed for all women to benefit from it. Social change is slow and uneven; all the more so since old power structures and values, especially the family and sex roles, resist change. Having a child is one of the most important and consequential acts of a lifetime. Rather than lamenting abortion itself, we should lament that society is still so unconscious in the fundamental arena of reproduction and child-rearing that most pregnancies are unintended, and that poverty, neglect, and abuse of children are prevalent. Only the obtuse would deny these two social problems are related. Some abortions would still be necessary as the bottom line of birth control even in a more perfect world, but far fewer. Now abortion is necessary to mitigate society's failures. An aware, caring society would promote the value of conscious conception and parenting to both men and women, and abortion would be valued as a necessary last resort.

### **TAKING THE MORAL OFFENSIVE**

Unless we present a morality that's superior to what I call the "pro-force" side, all other justifications for abortion will be continually eroded and our right to choose endangered. Instead of continuing to talk past each other, we must confront the religious right on the turf it wishes to monopolize—morality. We must challenge their polemic that depicts the act of abortion as immoral. The time is ripe to offer a powerfully articulated alternative moral view of abortion itself—not just of reducing the need for it. We cannot take the moral offensive to protect women's choice until we present abortion as a moral, positive act.

Many will argue that lowering the rate of unwanted pregnancies should be *the* top priority. I believe it should be a top priority. I also think that women's having unimpeded access to abortion is a prerequisite for the social changes needed to bring education and consciousness into the whole arena of reproduction. The essential reason for this is that freedom to choose the direction of one's life enables more women to consciously participate in the social, political spheres. Only by women being able to determine their reproductive destinies will the social climate begin to change and the need for abortion lessen. This alone gives women the protection needed in an imperfect world.

First of all, for abortion to be considered a moral act, it cannot be viewed as an isolated act, and thereby separate from other aspects of society. Instead the immense and negative repercussions on society of removing choice

must be made clear. We must not only undermine the opposition's stance on abortion, we have to undermine the whole moral system that stands behind it by presenting abortion rights as a consequence of a moral point of view that's good for everyone--women, men, children, families and society as a whole. One of our strategies should be to spell out the difference between our family values and theirs, which could break the spell this buzzword has over the media and politicians. *Moral Politics* by George Lakoff is useful because it contrasts the two opposing sets of family values and shows theirs is having a far more powerful effect on current politics partly because we do not articulate our moral framework as consistently and forcefully as they do.

To take the moral offensive, we must show their ideology is harmful to both individuals and the social order. Mother Theresa actually told multitudes that abortion is the primary cause of war and so those favoring it cause destruction. To counter this extraordinary lie, we have to challenge the value systems that make a woman's control over the direction of her life and biology an evil. We must have the courage to stand up and say that this belief, which is a remnant of the old moral order, is wrong and destructive to people's lives. Tragically, as long as the focus is on the dubious "rights" of zygotes, embryos, and fetuses rather than on what is good for women, good for parenting and thus for children, and good for society, all will suffer. What about the child's "right" to a responsible and willing mother--especially in this complex and dangerous world? We need to make very clear the immorality of forcing a woman to have a child she doesn't want for the broad social context. The deleterious effects of unwanted, uncared-for children on individuals, the family, and society are obvious. To state a positive position, we must take the risk of offending some who disagree with us. They don't seem too concerned about offending us. More importantly, we will surely change some minds, as well as inspire young women and the supporters we already have. We must move abortion from a single issue and explode it to interweave with many core issues: violence, poverty, quality of life, the stresses on and breakdown of the family, as well as conscious conception and reproduction, and democracy. We should make opposing it a litmus test of a whole mentality that's totally out of touch with the needs of the changing times.

The reason abortion is moral is very simple--although its implications are complex. The reason is this: *forcing any woman to have a child she doesn't want is harmful for the woman and for society*. It means bringing another unwanted and potentially uncared-for child into this world while limiting the woman's potential, including the potentials of her motherhood. It's not abortion but rather unwanted, inadequately cared for children who are one of the greatest sources of violence on the planet. Such children as they grow older are not only typically angry and prone to violence, but are potential time-bombs that can capriciously explode and destroy whatever is around them. *To choose not to give birth to a child when there's little foundation for her or his well-being is a moral and protective act.*

A human being is an intricate combination of nature and nurture. If society wants to foster good nurturing, as it should, it must protect women's choice. In this modern world, love and care are not givens and cannot be legislated, nor can good nurturing be forced. Since most women no longer accept being forced into old sex roles, choosing to nurture a child is a decision that only the nurturer should make. By mandating it, the "religious wrong" takes the nurture out of nature. Forcing children on women unprepared to nurture them omits the importance of nurturing in making humans human.

The old order is built upon women's choiceless submission to her biological destiny and traditional sex roles. Consequently, to free women from biology and put the decision in their hands shakes up the old order as it changes roles, values, and thus the structure of power. Abortion is such a volatile issue in part because it erodes the very underpinnings of the old moral order. The moral wars are about who wields the power to determine what's right. Looking at the abortion issue from the perspective of power reveals why the forces of fundamentalism worldwide oppose abortion, and some even oppose birth control.

Abortion is not just a women's issue. It's a planetary issue, a freedom and democracy issue, an ecological issue, and a men's and children's issue, too. Because it indicates and determines how women, men, and children are positioned, considered and cared for in any social order, it's a barometer of what a society is like. For women to

participate more equally in the networks of power, we must not be forced either by a wrong-headed social order, or by an accident of biology, to lead lives we don't want. Everyone has an opinion about the morality of abortion. The real moral question is whether another's morality should be forced on any woman in this most personal of all arenas. We can and must show why it is morally wrong to do so.

The way the opposition has gotten the media to discuss the abortion issue as a "pro-life vs. pro-choice" dichotomy puts us in a one-down, defensive position. How can choice compete with life as an ultimate value or on an emotional level? How can legal rights compete with morality, which is more basic? I propose stripping the facade off their "pro-life" identity by reframing the dichotomy as "*pro-choice vs. pro-force*" or "pro-freedom vs. pro-force." This can give us the moral high ground while unmasking them. It also shifts the focus to the process by which decisions are made. Basically, the moral issue is: who has the right to force a woman to have a child she doesn't want, and what are the implications of this for the social order? Wherever the forces of authoritarianism win on this issue, the world will suffer. If people were to begin thinking of the opposition as "pro-force" instead of "pro-life," this would help turn the tide.

Woman's recent ability to control her reproductive destiny is bringing about an unprecedented leap in social evolution. Like it or not, the potentials brought about by choice in one of humanity's most important and basic functions, reproduction, have implications of enormous magnitude. Freeing women to partake in all other aspects of society if they so choose transforms basic social roles and structures. Choice opens the possibility of conscious conception and reproduction for humanity, which is new and necessary because so many social problems and personal tragedies stem from the lack of consciousness in reproduction and unprepared parenting. Even though we are at the threshold of a new era, we are still fighting for reproductive freedom because the old authoritarian moral order cannot integrate its vast repercussions and extraordinary potential. Choice is necessary for conscious reproduction, and conscious reproduction is necessary to meet the momentous challenges humanity is facing.