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The Big Picture of Lives Saved by Abortion on Demand: User Pays Applied to Pro-Life Advocates

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The Big Picture of Lives Saved by Abortion on
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Abstract

Pro-life advocates focus on a single entity, the foetus. Pro-choice advocates focus on another single entity, the pregnant mother. There should also be a third focus, on all people already born – on how a new entrant on average damages (or enhances) the whole community. Communal accounts are needed on births, not only on wars. This third big picture communal focus reveals two things. First, abortion on demand *actually was* the biggest factor in reducing crimes and associated deaths in the US in the 1990s. Second, abortion on demand could have curbed the population growth that keeps the third world subject to poverty and early death. That is, being *pro life* for *foeti* means being *anti-life* for most people *already* born – means condemning many already born to being sub-human, living in conditions of crime, poverty and early death. Under a user pays principle, pro-life advocates would pay for these damages to those already born for bringing more people into an overcrowded world and into families unable to give the new born a good enough life to avoid many of the turning to crime. Pro-life advocates however have insufficient wealth to compensate the community for these damages, even were they willing to make massive sacrifices in this direction.

classification I

key words abortion on demand, pro-life, pro-choice, foetus, community, overpopulation, user pays, presidential candidates, Ron Paul, Rudolph Giuliani, anti-war, utilitarianism, Harsanyi

In the US, a key group of women availing themselves of cheap, easily available abortions are women in dire socio-economic circumstances, often with addiction problems and living in domestic violence. The children of such unwilling mothers have frequently had a disadvantageous life in the womb, giving them a poor physical start in life. The mother, having endured all the hardships of bringing a child into the world, frequently chooses to keep the child and not adopt it out. But on reaching late adolescence, the children of such mothers have a higher than average propensity for that age cohort to contribute to crime, damaging other families and the fabric of society.

Since the US sequentially introduced abortion on demand, it is feasible to trace how its introduction aided the fabric of US society, protecting families, and rendering cities like New York far more liveable. John Donohue of Stanford University and Steve Levitt of Chicago University, estimated that about 50% of the impressive reduction in crime rates that some US states experienced in the 90s could be attributed to the introduction of abortion on demand. These researchers found abortion on demand to be over twice as important as the improvement in the US economy, which they found to be the second most important factor that helped to reduce crime.

Presidential candidate, the former Mayor of New York Rudolph Giuliani, is thus to be congratulated on the reduction of crime that New York experienced under his auspices. He could not choose the New York economic boom that occurred in the 1990s. But it was Rudolph Giuliani's choice in the 1980s to support abortion on demand, the factor estimated to be twice as important in achieving the crime reduction as was the boom.

The findings of John Donohue and Steve Levitt help us see that in a rich country like the US, we need to consider not only the matter of whether we are saving a foetus when considering abortion. Besides the merits of saving a foetus, the findings remind us that we also need to consider: 1) what sort of life that foetus is likely to have while in that womb and after birth in our community; and 2) how many other people are likely to be damaged through poverty, criminal attacks and so forth, by a decision to reduce the number of abortions. Economists have done this sort of big picture computation over the entire last hundred years as regards government civilian expenditures and civilian economic regulations. It is a major contribution of economists to ask for the big picture, of who pays.

An increasing number of economists are asking big picture questions about environmental damage. They ask about who pays for governments permitting industrial development. An example is Ken Arrow's piece in the most recent Economists' Voice assessing the value of us curbing global warming.

Presidential candidate Ron Paul is to be congratulated for his raising the big picture matter that prior US bombing of Iraq played a role in September 11. It might be hoped that Ron Paul's entices more economists into research on the big picture question of the economic costs and risks of wars, and thus into the organisation, now named Economists for Peace and Security (EPS), which fosters such economics research. EPS has on its trustees board eminent economists (including the Economists' Voice editor Joe Stiglitz, its columnist Ken Arrow, Clive Granger, Lawrence Klein, Douglass North, Amartya Sen, Bill Sharpe, Bob Solow, and many others), has its own journal, and fosters books such as that out this year edited by Wolfram Elsner. Nevertheless economists are on the back foot in asking the big picture questions about who pays for the wars on which governments embark – they a need Ron Paul to get the topic into every course on public expenditure, and into every introductory economics course.

When it comes to addressing big picture questions about permitting and enticing increases in the population in general, and in particular, increases in the population from forcing unwillingly pregnant mothers to bear the child to normal birth, economists are even more on the back foot. Those seeking to address it lack even a nurturing organisation. Centuries ago economists did ask this big picture question, par excellence Thomas Malthus. John Maynard Keynes deemed him the greatest economist to have lived, such is the importance to economic welfare of the issue. After the Second World War however, economists announced that Malthus was wrong, that no increase in population harmed anyone already born, that technical progress avoided all problems.

One post world war II class of exceptions is those with affinities to the reasoning of the late John Harsanyi who used a utilitarian framework to ask the big question. He presented the case for maximising the utility of those already living. He advocated not permitting additional births beyond the point where they on average damage the already living. One of Harsanyi's notable successors in asking about optimal population with regard to poverty and a sustainable environment is Partha Dasgupta.

A second set of post world war II economists to have looked at this big picture question of the impact of population increments are those with an interest in migration on the countries gaining and losing. The late The late Heinz Arndt (an interned Jew despatched during World War II to Australia where he subsequently took a chair at the Australian National University) for instance, was noted for the view that it damaged Australian per capita income having the large influx of World War II refugees – but did marvels for the refugees and their countries of origin (too poor to support them), and constituted appropriate altruism on the part of rich Australia. David Pope's detailed econometric studies confirmed Heinz Arndt's conjectures.¹

A few developmental economists, such as Michael Todaro, have taken a square look at the discrepancy between the economists' myth that technology overcomes any hurdle to countries expanding their populations. His text reveals that countries poor today have had population growths that are about double that of the US (and other rich countries) since 1950, and indeed over the whole last century. This rapid population growth in already poor countries has resulted in an increasing burden of children to be supported relative to the number of working age adults, and inadequate capital per worker to allow workers to be productive enough. Had these third world countries been able to limit their population growth to that of the US over this last half century, their current resources in 2007 could

¹ The influx of refugees and subsequent influxes of non-English speaking immigrants to be employed in Australia's low skill (no English needed) highly protected sweatshop industries, David Pope found, had damaged the depth and efficacy of Australian infrastructure an investment in human capital formation in ways that reduced the per capita income of those already in the country.

enable their people to be about twice as well off – not poverty stricken and in many cities of the third world, living in crime ridden congested sub-human conditions.

Abortion on demand can aid in reducing the horror of third world deprivation from over-population. Research in these countries reveals pressure from males for more children. Means of increasing the financial independence of females, such as micro-financing of their mini-trading activities, reduces the overpopulation burden in those villages. Those in the third world are less liable to be attracted into suicide bombing outlets and so forth moreover, if not living in dire poverty readily entirely sheeted at the rich US. But contrary to its own interests in reducing the world number of suicide bombers, the US has hampered most UN efforts at retarding population increases in the third world. Ron Paul's isolationist policy could be welded with a big picture altruism for those in the third world by opposing such US interference with abortion on demand in third world countries.

In short, by assessing the big picture as regards having more children born, above all more to reluctantly pregnant mothers, economists could contribute markedly to policy in the US, in other developed countries, and in the third world. Economists can use their tool of calculating tradeoffs on this vital issue. The good of saving foeti that after birth have happy fulfilled lives as do their natural and adopted families, has to be set against the bads. Pro-life advocates lack the resources and means of enticing many pregnant women who in the US might seek an abortion, to live in a healthy drug-free manner during the pregnancy, and then adopt the baby out to suitable families. Instead, pro-life policies are increasing the number of children born into dire circumstances and damage their family, their school mates and from late adolescence onwards, the wider community by turning to crime.

Thus bads of pro-life policies in the US include the sub-human life that many of these foeti would turn out to live. They are sub-human because of their sub-standard experiences in the womb and because of the damaged impoverished status of the family in which a disproportionate number of them will live. The bads also include the increase in poverty and hardship and crime that arise for others already born in having to cope with the extra being living in this deprived situation.

A user pays principle might tax pro-life advocates for the bads engendered (i) at home and (ii) by having the pro-life policy exported to the third world. The cost is not simply that of arranging acceptable accommodation to the pregnant mother and techniques for giving the foetus a happy undrugged life in the womb until the birth (with an often unrealised hope that then the mother will agree to adopt it out). For that proportion of rescued foeti by Pro-life policies who will have had a damaging life in the womb, the costs include post natal often lifelong health support. For that proportion of foeti rescued by Pro-life policies whom impoverished mothers then choose to keep, the costs also include those of raising to a human standard *the entire impoverished family throughout its entire life*. Insofar as this human standard cannot be attained, the damage to the wider community through having a less educated workforce and more criminal activity needs to be computed. For the US, some of these damage calculations could involve estimates of the average amount of criminal damage and the amount of additional crime arising in the US, using the econometric estimates of Professors John Donohue and Steve Levitt. Related estimates could be made of the extent to which third world population growth might have been curbed, saving people there from poverty and early death in the absence of the US pro-life vetoes on such policies being conducted in third world countries by the World Health Organisation and other international bodies.

Plausibly, taxes that fully compensated these US and third world people for the net community damage of the pro-life policies, would far exceed the income and wealth of pro-life advocates. A user pays tax on pro-Life advocates is thus impractical to implement fully. A partial user pays tax could however be

implemented. It would serve to highlight the communal costs of a pro-life policy. It can lift the abortion discussion beyond an unhelpfully individualistic level in which no solid effort is made to consider compensation to innocent third parties such as siblings, other family members, neighbours and taxpayers in those cases where the rescued foeti impose net negative externalities.

Discussion of a user pays principle with liabilities even only a fraction of current estimated actual costs could help inform discussion, and limit the readiness of groups to counsel retention of foeti if the group faced some risk of liability for the subsequent financial and general welfare of those affected in the same way that those offering financial advice face some risk of liability if their advice is perceived as subsequently damaging. Financial advisers often indulge in wishful thinking in advising customers that investments will prove bonanzas and often no liability. But they face a whiff of danger, that curbs some excesses in this direction.

Likewise discussion can take the form of transfers. A government body could consider requiring a third party insurance deposit from pro-life organisation for each individual counselled to drop her abortion plan. The insurance deposit should not trouble any pro-life advocate who deems that (contrary to past experience), this policy will result in no third party costs because females will refrain from sex except when certain they wish to bring up a child or are certain they will happily and healthily bear the foetus to birth and then have it adopted out, they must lodge a sum with the government. That insurance deposit is then returned to the pro-life organisation – with interest and inflation compensation – 20 years later if indeed on average what they anticipated came to pass. In the meantime, in order to limit the probable communal damage of deprived mothers having additional children, the government uses at least the interest thereon to improve head start and related measures.

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