

## **Societal background**

A society which aborts its unborn children is engaged in a dehumanising and abusive relationship with its members, and suffers from a conflicted mentality in which women in general are both desperate to bear children – hence the promotion of expensive artificial fertility techniques such as in vitro fertilisation, donor-assisted conception, artificial insemination and surrogate motherhood; and desperate to avoid children – hence the legality of mass abortion and contraceptive practices. It is reasonable to ask whether a similar relationship and mentality is manifested within the moral characters of those who perform abortions.

## **Subject background**

The effect of abortion upon individuals is often only considered in terms of physical effects (usually the death of the unborn child and the physical risks of the abortion procedure to the erstwhile mother) or occasionally psychological effects (such as post-abortion trauma upon the erstwhile mother). What seems not to have been considered very much is the effect that abortion has on the development of the moral character of those persons who perform abortions (doctors and nurses) or are closely related to the performance of abortion (abortion clinic workers). Neglecting to seek to understand the agents at the nexus of this worldwide ‘structure of sin’ – the doctors, nurses and other professionals participating in the performance of abortion – and to discover what abortion may be doing to their moral characters, would be missing what may be a key piece of the jigsaw puzzle of the abortion phenomenon. The abortion industry makes an abortion for a woman as quick, clinical and uneventful as possible, whereas abortion doctors and staff must deal frequently, even hourly, with the multifarious manifestations of abortion, from the dismemberment of a late-term foetus to the incineration of foetal remains, from the distress of women presenting for abortion to the exclusion of their speciality from open community recognition. We should not only look for, but expect there to be, evidence of certain harms done by abortion to abortionists. One way of doing this is to understand the formation of the moral characters of those adults.

## **Habituation**

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches (quote): "Sin creates a proclivity to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root." (unquote) Aristotle and those who have followed in his footsteps such as Boethius, St Thomas Aquinas and the virtue theorists of the modern age such as Elizabeth Anscombe and Alasdair MacIntyre share this same teaching.

**Self-harm**

It has been held by respected authorities that those who do wrong against others harm themselves as well their victims. Socrates, Plato, Cicero and the Stoic philosophers Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus are among the authorities in the ancient world who held this. The Judaeo-Christian Scriptures expresses theological and spiritual beliefs about the ultimately self-destructive nature of doing wrong which run parallel to the philosophical and ethical beliefs of the ancient authorities. The Second Vatican Council, which describes abortion as an “infamy” which “poison[s] human society”, teaches that abortion “do[es] more harm to those who practice [it] than to those who suffer from the injury.”

**Structure of sin**

Much of what negative effect abortion may have upon moral character may be due to the practice of abortion as the dynamic element in the creation of a 'structure of sin'.

**Instrumentalisation**

Let us look at the example of the abortionist who does abortion solely or primarily for money. He instrumentalises himself as a doctor by using his medical skills not to serve the higher goal of the ends of medicine, but to serve the lower goal of personal gain. He instrumentalises his patients (both women and unborn children) by treating them not as ends in themselves but as sources of money. His women-patients may be instrumentalising him, by using his skills not to serve the ends of medicine, but to solve their personal social problems by ending their pregnancies. The abortionist therefore is at the heart of a structure of sin, which negatively affects his moral character through endemic mutual instrumentalisation of the persons involved. Indeed, it can be argued that instrumentalisation is the root cause of the phenomenon of abortion. It is therefore unsurprising that the operative person involved in abortion - the abortionist - is himself left instrumentalised.

**Falsification**

The effect of instrumentalisation is falsification. This principle has been made in relation to the effect of contraception upon sexual intercourse. The abortionist ceases to be a doctor but becomes instead a hired technician; the woman ceases to be a mother-patient but becomes instead a customer or client; the health service ceases to be a restorer of health but becomes instead a social engineer. Such falsification is particularly damaging when one considers that the profession of medicine and the gift of motherhood are vocations - a calling to order one's life with deep personal effect according to an adopted pattern. A vocation, if either followed or falsified, will have profound effects upon one's identity, as perceived by both others and by the person themselves. As the

abortionist is at the heart of a nexus of the instrumentalisation and thereby falsification of these revered things - this nexus being a 'structure of sin' known as the 'culture of death', it can be assumed that his moral character will thereby be negatively affected.

### **Ignorant?**

Dr Bernard Nathanson has been asked how his conscience and ethical training had allowed him to perform abortions. Among the various reasons he has given was that neither he nor his colleagues (quote) "had the solid inner core of spiritual strength necessary to remind us of the enormity of the evil we were perpetrating." The most likely negative effect upon abortionists may be the obscuring of their innate tendency towards the natural law in failing to distinguish unjustifiable homicide from medical treatment. Invincible ignorance of 'Thou shalt not kill' (in the commonly-held sense of 'intentional killing of the innocent i.e. non-aggressors is wrong') is in general not plausible, because it is a primary precept of the natural law, which we Catholics believe is engraved upon the heart of every man, as taught by St Paul in Romans 11. Although the Ten Commandments were divinely revealed, they are in fact simply expressions of the natural law which God confirmed for man's benefit. 'Thou shalt not kill' is not a religious commandment *per se* but a principle of the natural moral law which God, the Author of all true law, etched on man's heart at man's creation. All of the Ten Commandments are principles which man can sense by the light of his reason, even if he cannot fully understand or articulate them. In terms of knowledge specific to abortion, it is not plausible to claim that abortionists are invincibly ignorant, considering (among others) the awareness among doctors of the prohibition on abortion in the Hippocratic Oath and the arguments against abortion frequently presented in public debate in the mainstream media.

### **Thinking corrupted by actions**

Some abortionists may be suppressing their consciences through believing their own rhetoric. We can assume that some abortionists have started doing abortions for reasons of self-interest alone such as money or career, but have subsequently adopted arguments rejecting the natural-law prohibition on intentional killing as a defence for the acts of their profession. Such a corruption of moral thinking may be an inevitable outcome of the legal existence of abortion. The brittleness of believing one's own rhetoric, however, naturally crumbles into self-doubt.

### **Regeneration of abortionists**

It is truly telling that both the pioneer of mass abortion, Bernard Nathanson, and the woman whose case made mass abortion possible in the US, Norma McCorvey, who herself went on to work in a clinic, suffered negative effects on their moral character because of their abortion work. They had a

choice to follow those negative effects further into a downward spiral or transform into moral regeneration, and they eventually choose the latter.

Some former abortionists recognise that performing abortions has had a negative effect upon their moral characters. Also, the conscience of a person possessing a vicious moral character can re-awaken, and even such a vice as serial killing of the innocent does not result in absolute and irrevocable corruption of an individual's human nature. These facts allow us to ponder whether the pro-life movement should develop a hitherto unknown outreach not only to former abortionists, but to current abortionists, not for any strategic or political gain, but out of genuine and hopeful concern for their personal and moral well-being. Dr Philip Ney and his wife Dr Marie Peeters have established the Society of Centurions to support former abortion doctors going through this process. The Society is named after the Roman centurion St Longinus, who, after plunging his lance into the side of Jesus Christ hanging on the cross, exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God". The Society believes that former abortion doctors have seen the "image and likeness of God" in the unborn and decided to drop their lance-like abortion instruments.

### **New approach**

There is, therefore, a foundation for a new and potentially effective approach to abortion, one which can broaden and deepen the concerns of the pro-life movement. If we can explain what effect abortion has on the moral character of abortionists, we may then know how to change the formation of medical staff so that abortion becomes unthinkable for them until it becomes illegal for them.

### **Banality of evil**

One theory that may shed some light on how rational adults can commit such a gruesome as abortion is the 'banality of evil'. Dr Bernard Nathanson has said that when he was an abortionist he "had become as Hannah Arendt described Eichmann: a collection of functions rather than an accountable human being." Nathanson's reference is to Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt's famous account of the 1961 trial for war crimes of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi official primarily responsible for the deportation and transportation of Jews to death camps such as Auschwitz. Speaking of the Holocaust, Arendt pointed to "the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us - the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil." The phenomenon of "the banality of evil" means that any negative effects upon the moral characters of those perpetrating these evils are not immediately obvious to society or are even hidden under professional and personal respectability.

### **Nazi Germany – abortion in Britain**

There is also a similarity in the processing of requests for abortion in Britain today and the processing of decisions to kill children in Nazi Germany, in that both systems rely upon a system of referral which divides up responsibility for the decision to kill. Under the Abortion Act 1967, the signatures of two doctors are required for an authorisation of an abortion, and the doctor who performs the abortion may or may not be one of the signatories. There is evidence that the doctor-signatories do not even see the patient before signing the abortion authorisation form.

### **Communist era research needed**

In the same way that comparisons, connections and distinctions have been made between abortionists today and the role of persons individually and collectively in Nazi Germany, similar work could be extended to encompass both abortion and other intentional killings in Communist-era eastern Europe, where abortion rates were extremely high, with abortion in some instances being the primary form of birth control.

### **Evidence of limited value**

Regarding qualitative and quantitative evidence of a degradation of moral character among abortionists, some initial work in this area has been done by Dr Philip Ney and his wife Dr Marie Peeters, by Dr Rachel McNair and by Mark Crutcher of Life Dynamics. Ney and Peeters found in their survey of former abortionists that 100% felt that they were moderately or completely dehumanised by the abortion industry. However, as no *independent* quantitative studies or *independent* qualitative studies have been conducted into the moral characters of abortionists, the evidence is necessarily of limited value at this time. The evidence is furthermore limited mostly to the United States. We should therefore seek to use this limited evidence not for purposes of making strong claims or reaching definitive conclusions but merely to reflect upon the evidence and be enabled thereby to pose certain questions.

### **Ill effects**

There are some indications which suggest that substance abuse, sexual abuse, lack of respect for women, deceit, and gross negligence of professional standards may be common within the abortion industry, at least within the United States. Other phenomena, not necessarily directly associated by society generally with moral degradation, but a possible indication of personality breakdown or similar tension, are also connected anecdotally with abortion practice. Mental illness, failure at relationships and suicidal tendencies are also attributed to the experience of abortionists, at least 'repentant' abortionists in the aftermath of their rejection of the practice of abortion. It should be

noted that suffering from a personality disorder and conducting an outwardly relatively normal personal and professional life are not incompatible.

### **More data needed**

Research into the negative effect of abortion on the moral character of abortionists can only evolve through the collection of more data. Surveys of current abortionists may be necessary to provide the data necessary to test possible theories. There are a number of potential obstacles, however, to a survey of current abortionists, such as access to a sufficient cohort. It may be difficult to compile contact-details of abortionists. Abortionists may refuse to respond. Pro-abortion groups may advise abortionists not to respond. Abortionists may under- or over-report more in a survey by a pro-lifer than they would in a survey by a pro-abortion or neutral surveyor, thereby skewing the data gathered. I am unaware of any surveys of British abortionists. There are significant differences in the abortion 'cultures' of the US and other countries, which mean that data from the US cannot be used to make definitive conclusions about abortionists in other countries. It may therefore not be possible to conduct a survey that is ethical, objective or statistically valuable.

### **Goal**

A good outcome would be to make those currently unconvinced of the objective wrongness of abortion to question whether abortion, viewed subjectively in terms of the effect on one's character, is desirable. Pro-abortion groups complain of an increasing shortage of abortionists, and want to recruit nurses into administering non-surgical abortions. Both exacerbating this shortage and preventing new recruitment are worthwhile and necessary goals for the pro-life movement. It may be possible to convince medical staff that abortion will affect negatively their moral characters. Medics ambitious for their careers may then increasingly avoid performing abortions, see any money to be made from abortion as 'danger money' or even a Faustian pact, and conclude about abortion that 'where there's smoke, there's fire': abortion is unethical. After all, the term 'ethics' comes from the Greek word 'ethos' meaning 'character'. Bad ethics is rightly associated with bad character. I also hope that by reflecting upon the negative effect of abortion upon the moral character of abortionists and the action of conscience within abortionists, a need for greater respect for conscientious objection to abortion may be seen.

### **Further work needed**

Despite there being evidence both at a theoretical and an evidential level for claiming that abortion negatively effects the moral character of abortionists, further work needs to be done at both levels to demonstrate this convincingly.