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*The Moral Case for Abortion* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). ISBN 978-1-137-41118-1, 165 pp.  
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-41119-8

Ann Furedi presents an impassioned and strong argument in support of a woman's right to choose the outcome of her pregnancy. In her book, *The Moral Case for Abortion*, she advocates not being pro-abortion, but pro-choice.

To uphold a “woman's choice” in the context of her reproductive rights means supporting her rights to have an abortion, but also her choice to *not* have an abortion. It means supporting her rights to use contraception or to *not* use contraception. Supporting her reproductive choice is based on the principle that regardless of her reasons, her circumstances, or the outcomes—she gets to decide.<sup>1</sup>

Furedi approaches the debate of the morality of abortion from an original and interesting angle. By using a framework of morality, Furedi is taking the fight directly to pro-life campaigners who have long used morality as the basis of their argument that abortion is an unacceptable act due to the destruction of human life. She argues, ‘Whether a woman can be compelled to carry a fetus and give birth to a baby is just as much a moral question as those raised about the value of the fetus’.<sup>2</sup>

Furedi opens the book with an explanation as to why she believes the pro-choice campaign need to embrace a moral argument. Furedi notes that in recent decades the debate about abortion has been redrawn using value- and judgement-free thinking, such as whether abortion is safe or appropriate, rather than considering if it is right or wrong. While this argument is convincing, as international non-government organisations regularly report on the high death rates from illegal abortions, Furedi argues, as an argument for abortion it falls short, ‘it side-steps, and redirects attention from, important questions concerning the nature of our basic value when it comes to maternal health and life’.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Furedi directly connects with the moral question of abortion with the aim of demonstrating that having an ‘abortion can *be right* and should be seen as *a right*’.<sup>4</sup>

Each chapter adds to a picture of the nature of pregnancy and abortion in contemporary western society, building the argument that a woman's decision to end her pregnancy can be seen as morally correct. In Chapter 2, Furedi argues that abortion is a fact of life that needs to be accepted. Noting the world abortion rate currently stands at 45 million abortions,<sup>5</sup> Furedi argues that abortion is almost as common as childbirth. As we live in a society where fertile women have sex with fertile men without wanting a child, Furedi argues that abortion is necessary as a form of contraception – contraception fails and sometimes we fail to use contraception, and so abortion is required as a back-up plan. Tackling the adoption element of the debate, Furedi argues adoption is an alternative to motherhood, not to abortion, as it requires a woman to continue to be pregnant against her wishes. For women to have an active role in society, they must be able to control motherhood, an aspect of this is the ability to control the timing of pregnancy. This, for Furedi, is the justification for abortion in general, and for her argument that abortion is a form of contraception.

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<sup>1</sup> Furedi, ‘The Case Against “The Case Against”’, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, ‘Concluding Thoughts’, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, ‘Introduction: Why Abortion Needs a Moral Defence’, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, ‘Why Abortion Is a Fact of Life’, p. 9.

Following explanation of the need for abortion, Furedi outlines the moral arguments against it, focusing on the argument that human life starts at conception. Furedi demonstrates how this perspective has filtered into social and cultural norms, with foetuses being assigned human personality in the minds of the public, used by pro-life campaigners to construct abortion as “horror”. This chapter is directly followed by a rebuttal. Furedi makes it clear that she conceptualises the foetus as human life. She acknowledges the impasse between pro-life and pro-choice campaigners, noting the key debate lies in consideration of what value is attached to the life of the woman and the life of the foetus, and which life should matter more. Furedi notes that arguments supporting access to abortion have often constructed it as a justifiable wrong. The consequence of such arguments, Furedi argues, has been the regulation of abortion under law, this maintains and reinforces stigma and removes the choice of abortion from the pregnant woman.

The crux of Furedi’s argument of the morality of abortion lies in her conceptualisation of the life of the foetus and pregnant woman. Drawing on Ronald Dworkin’s argument that the ancient Greeks had two distinct terms for life – *zoë* meaning biological life in the sense of being “alive”, and *bios* referring to the personal life-course of an individual, the life we “know”,<sup>6</sup> Furedi argues a pregnant woman has full human life, while a foetus only has biological life. Foetuses possess *zoë*, not *bios*, ‘and it is bios that puts the “human” in human life’.<sup>7</sup> Furedi argues the essential point is not when life begins, but when life begins to matter. A distinction she sees as crucial is between lives that are valuable in the eyes of others, and those that are valuable to themselves. The first category will include the broad diversity of organic matter, for example, we value crops because we can eat them. The second category of life ‘is that which has value, not instrumentally, because we value it, but because *it values itself*’.<sup>8</sup> Furedi argues that it is not the content of the account a person provides for why their life is valuable, but that the individual has the capacity to give the account. In relation to the abortion debate, Furedi argues that of importance is how the value of the woman’s life is weighed against the balance of her embryo. ‘Abortion may be an act of killing—but it kills a being that has no sense of life or death, and no awareness of itself as distinct from others’.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the foetus who lacks human personhood, a woman is a person throughout her pregnancy. ‘She is living and has a life to live. She is self-conscious and self-aware; she *knows!*’<sup>10</sup> Following this justification of women’s lives and rights over and above those of the foetus, Furedi outlines reasons upon which women, and women alone, should decide whether or not to abort a foetus, notably her rights to bodily integrity and autonomy. In defence of these rights, Furedi outlines her critique of legal control and regulation of abortion in the UK. She also challenges feminist thinkers who have questioned the concept of women’s autonomy and availability of choice within neo-liberal, patriarchal society. Her analysis of reproductive justice theories is brief and hand-hitting, advocating that women do have a choice as to how to react, even if they lack full control of the circumstances they face. Furedi’s support of women’s autonomy and agency is admirable, but I cannot help but feel her criticisms of reproductive justice is over zealous, focusing on a small number of authors to critique an entire theory.

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<sup>6</sup> R. Dworkin, *Life’s Dominion: An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom* (London: HarperCollins, 1993) p. 82; in *ibid*, ‘It is Human? Do We Care?’, p. 82.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p. 100.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, ‘Because Women Are People’, p. 103.

There is no doubt that this is a political book. Furedi makes no secret of her interests in the pro-choice campaign. As the Chief Executive of British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS), a not-for-profit provider of abortion services in the UK, Furedi makes it clear from the outset that she is an advocate for women's reproductive rights and freedoms. Furedi describes the book not as 'justification for my work, which I believe need neither justification nor apology. Rather it is an attempt to explain why I believe that the struggle for women's right to choose is so important'.<sup>11</sup> Furedi touches on the difficulties women face in accessing abortion in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Advocating that current legal sanctions disadvantage women, she argues that abortion in the UK should be decriminalised, currently the focus of a BPAS campaign – *We Trust Women*.<sup>12</sup> I, personally, do not find the political angle and personal opinion to be a negative aspect of the book. Indeed, the impassioned support for a woman's right to choose is inspiring.

The book is designed to be read cover to cover, with the argument building throughout. The informal writing style and sparsity of references makes it accessible and appealing to non-academic readers and students. Complex theoretical arguments are broken down and explained in a manner that will aid readers who have limited prior knowledge of the debates. It will similarly appeal to academics well versed in abortion theory due to its new review of a long-standing debate and its reliance on a variety of academic sources.

This book was clearly written with a purpose in mind – to challenge those in the debate who argue there can be no moral justification for ending a pregnancy and destroying a foetus. In this respect, I believe the book achieves its aim. Nevertheless, in teasing out this argument, the subject focus shifts rapidly and often. While this does not distract from the strength of the argument, it does, in places, prevent a broader understanding of the key arguments. For example, in Chapter 3 Furedi could have expanded the conservative debate into the concept of human life beginning at conception. This criticism is perhaps harsh considering the intended reader and Furedi's acknowledgement in the introduction that she makes no claim to be an academic. What is very successful in the book is an opening up of the debate away from theory to ideas and concepts that non-specialists will recognise. For example, when discussing the concept of human life beginning at conception, Furedi demonstrates how science and popular culture have supported such perspectives, notably using the example of obstetrics ultrasounds, which allow the foetus to be seen and represented as a baby.

A further critique could be levied at Furedi's justification of the moral status of the foetus. The justification that the foetus lacks capacity to value itself and therefore is not on an equivalent moral standing with the woman who is pregnant, does potentially welcome the question as to the moral standing of the newborn child. This would invite the criticism often faced by commenters who argue that fetuses lack human personhood – is it then acceptable to kill a child following birth as it, like the foetus, lacks the essence which defines being a human person? Furedi argues that the process of birth has significant impact on the moral status of the foetus (and then born child), as postbirth the baby is no longer dependent on the maternal environment and so its interests can be considered independently of the mother's interests for the first time. My criticism is a minor point and arguably does not detract from the key arguments of the book. Furedi is concerned with advocating that a moral argument in

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<sup>11</sup> *Supra* note 3, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> *We Trust Women*, 2016, 'About the campaign'. Retrieved 7 December 2014, <http://www.wetrustwomen.org.uk/about-the-campaign/>.

support of abortion exists, rather than in a theoretical debate as to what constitutes human life.

Of course, some will completely disagree with Furedi's position and the logic of her arguments. Furedi recognises this when considering how the value of the lives of the woman and the foetus are conceptualised. However, I believe she makes a convincing and compelling argument for the moral justification of abortion. In advocating 'support for access to abortion, as early as possible and as late as necessary',<sup>13</sup> Furedi makes a strong stand for a woman's right to choose, advocating that women, and women alone, have the knowledge to make a decision about their pregnancy.

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<sup>13</sup>*Supra* note 1, p. 80.