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Marx v. Flanigan: A Discussion on Abortion

James Fallin

Dr. Richard Flanigan looked up from the magazine he had been perusing. Several cancellations at the women's center that afternoon left him with some free time before his next appointment. Flanigan felt disgust for the young women who had called that morning to say they had a change of heart about the procedure. Oh well! So what if a few easily swayed teens fell for the pro-life rhetoric? With the free time, he sat down at the receptionist's desk, preparing to while away the hour with some light reading. An older man, with a bushy beard and dressed in old fashioned clothes, appeared in the clinic waiting room. The stranger bore a striking resemblance to a picture Flanigan remembered from an old college textbook – a picture of Karl Marx.

Flanigan: Excuse me sir, may I help you?

Marx: Perhaps we may help each other. What is this building that I find myself in?

Flanigan: It is my workplace, a women's medical center.

Marx: Judging from all the people holding signs outside I assume you are either quite famous, or perhaps controversial.

Flanigan: Yes, I perform abortions here, and those pro-choice religious nuts out there are trying to shut me down. Excuse my forwardness, but you look very, ah, familiar.

Marx: Religion has always seemed to get in the way of true societal harmony. If people would do away with such subjective realities that merely comfort a deeper fracturing of social structure the world would be a much better place. It's simply inconceivable to not live according to empirical knowledge (McBride, 1977). In answering your assumption, no we have never met, I assure you. I am quite a bit older than you, and also a lot more important!

Flanigan: Well then sir, I don't feel bad saying this then, but you look very much like Karl Marx himself.

Marx: Why would you feel bad about that, sir? I am Marx indeed, and have traveled all this way to have a far more stimulating conversation than this, I hope.

Flanigan: Alright, I'll go along with it – what would you like to talk about?

Marx: We can start by discussing this abortion procedure you mentioned. I vaguely remember that it has to do with childbirth.

Flanigan: Yes, it's a procedure that results in the termination and expulsion of a pregnancy before birth (Planned Parenthood, 2009).

Marx: Why is there so much controversy surrounding it?

Flanigan: The whole argument people use is that they think the fetus is a person, which of course it's not. They would give the aggregation of cells a higher priority than the mother, an obvious person with thoughts and feelings.

Marx: So you kill a living substance that bears no obvious signs of thought, in order to help the mother who can think. It sounds perfectly logical to me.

Flanigan: Really, well I'm glad we agree!

Marx: Of course, why it's so plain. I am therefore I think. A person is only a person if it possesses an observable trait of personhood (Kreeft, 2003).

Flanigan: You mean "I think therefore I am." It's Descartes who said that, I believe.

Marx: No, Goodness No! Descartes was an idiot. A physical, functioning mind must come first. I'm pleased to see that your government has realized the truth (Kreeft, 2003).

Flanigan: I don't think that's what I meant sir; people are people regardless of mental state. Think of people in comatose states, or mentally handicapped.

Marx: Hmmpf! They have been a drain on society for far too long! You don't see other animal kinds wasting their resources on the sick or weak. Its pure science my boy, or have you people forgotten Darwin?

Flanigan: Well, no sir, I believe in Darwinian evolution. Darwin himself stated that it would be unheard of for human society to function to the full extent that natural selection demanded, though. We just know the fetus is not a person, thus it must be treated differently.

Marx: Of course it's not, and neither are imbeciles and lunatics. The weakness of Darwin was in not believing his own discovery. Human kind is just that, a kind. We must function in the way that our evolutionary instinct and senses dictate. We have stifled our true selves with capitalism, religion, and idealism. You, yourself, display belief in that logic when you perform abortions. (Fromm, 1961).

Flanigan: Sir, that sounds just downright unethical and immoral. You can't just eradicate individuals that slow down society.

Marx: Do you only perform abortions on fetuses that are defective?

Flanigan: Well, not always. Many women just can't handle the kind of life changes that would come with a baby. It can seem very overwhelming, you know.

Marx: So, a great many abortions are performed on perfectly healthy fetuses?

Flanigan: Well, yes, I suppose so.

Marx: What basis do you have for the argument that lunatics and imbeciles are worthy of life, and yet not fetuses? I see the right to destroy the non-contributors of society as an intrinsic right. It's displayed every time I observe nature – or are you a religious idealist rather than a scientist?

Flanigan: I'm not religious, I'm just saying there must be a moral compass in populations of humans. We are a higher being than the animals around us. The handicapped may not contribute to society, but they are persons and it would be wrong to kill them. Fetuses aren't contributing to society at all, since you seem to think that is an important qualification to personhood.

Marx: Be careful, doctor, you are starting to sound like those people outside protesting you. Believe in your own logic: we evolved just like every other creature. We are no higher, and have no higher imaginary code to live by. We don't have a soul, that infernal concept so touted by Socrates that has ruined humanity for centuries! We are bound only to the good of the population as a whole. We must treat society as the true organism, and we are just individual parts, that should be working in harmony to propagate our existence. But, what good do we do for the continuation of society if we kill its future members? Unfortunately, extra moral values have debased society and created fragmentation that causes nothing but wars, poverty, and unhappiness. (Fromm, 1961; Kreeft, 2003). But furthering human society is a laudable goal, one that you are fight against by killing its future members.

Flanigan: Your ideas have merit, but they still seem to inevitably lead to nihilistic hopelessness. Just because I terminate a baby doesn't mean I don't believe in a higher purpose or the good of society.

Marx: A baby?

Flanigan: Er, I meant fetus! You know what I mean. We have no proof a fetus is a person.

Marx: There is obvious proof that it is not a person?

Flanigan: No, we don't have that either. It's just unclear. It's obviously biologically alive, but to say that an unthinking conglomeration of cells is a person is just too far-fetched to believe.

Marx: You say that your comatose victims are persons, and that your imbeciles are persons, but you refuse to say your fetuses are persons. Forgive me Doctor, but I deplore unscientific thought, and you seem to be doubling back on your logic. The fetus can do nothing to benefit society, thus it is not a member of that society. But the fetus, if allowed to develop, could become a contributing member of society. Yet you give the fetus fewer rights than the comatose victims or imbeciles, who will never contribute! Remember, there is no other higher morality involved, and obviously there is no higher being setting the rules. There certainly is no life after death.

Flanigan: Sir, I have never thought of myself as remotely religious, but the picture you have given me of true belief in an atheistic worldview is quite bleak.

Marx: You are expressing belief in empirical science every day you go to work, Doctor. You kill something you would apparently classify as person, if only it were out of the womb.

Flanigan: Mr. Marx, I have to get back to work. Can find your way to the door?

Marx: Certainly, but can you find your way to your true belief, Dr. Flanigan?

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