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## Marni Soupcoff: I don't know where to draw the line on abortion. I just wish there was a line



MARNI SOUPCOFF | May 18, 2017 3:52 PM ET  
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Bottles of abortion pill RU-486, Mifegymiso in Canada and mifepristone in other places.

Charlie Neibergall/The Canadian Press

In a column five years ago, I described Canada's current legal approach to abortion as existing in a moral vacuum. A woman may legally abort a fetus at any stage for any reason. It isn't that I know this approach to be wrong. Rather, it is that I think this approach is, at best, a thoughtless choice arrived at by default, due to an unwillingness to engage with an extremely difficult issue. At worst, I think this approach is disingenuous, with proponents proclaiming moral neutrality, but taking indirect steps to limit the likelihood of sex-selective abortions of female fetuses and increase the likelihood of abortions of fetuses with genetic developmental disorders.

The charade that abortion should, or even can, be divorced from moral considerations is (perhaps necessarily) often adopted by the medical community. We have a case study in a recent research paper that was published in the medical publication *The BMJ*, which considers the efficacy of abortion through telemedicine. The authors of the study looked at 1,000 women in Ireland and Northern Ireland (both jurisdictions where legal abortion is highly restricted) who ended their early pregnancies by self-sourcing medications from a non-profit group called Women on Web (WoW), which provides online abortion consultation services.

The medical community often adopts the charade that abortion should, or even can, be divorced from moral considerations.

The report concludes that these "Internet abortions" (the *Washington Post's* term, not the researchers') can be "highly effective," with outcomes as good as or better than those seen with abortions done in clinical settings. The researchers acknowledge, though, that their sample may not be sufficient: more than 400 Irish women who received pills from WoW during the study period never followed up with WoW to report their outcomes, so the researchers' results are based entirely on the remaining women's self-reporting.

An accompanying *BMJ* editorial declares enthusiastically that "for the first time in history, women of all social classes in a legally restricted yet high resource setting have equitable access to a reasonable (abortion) alternative."

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If we set aside questions about the scientific rigour of the study, and assume the study's reported rates of medical complications and women's ability to seek medical help when required are representative, self-sourced abortions do seem to be a promising means of harm reduction. Medication that is safe by Western pharmaceutical standards and provided after doctors have reviewed the pregnancy in question (albeit on paper) is certainly preferable to a woman self-aborting with a rusty coat hanger. Likewise, any longer-term effects women may suffer as a result of "Internet abortions" – whether these be psychological or physical – are unlikely to be any worse than what the women would have experienced after getting an abortion in a medical clinic.

## There is something unnerving about the upbeat tone with which the writers describe the success of the medical abortions.

And yet, there is something unnerving about the completely upbeat and casual tone with which the researchers and editorial writers describe the success of the medical abortions. It's as though abortion through telemedicine is of no more consequence than a self-sourced round of antibiotics for a case of strep throat.

What struck me as most strange – and a touch sad – is WoW's own website. It includes an explanatory video of how to give yourself a medical abortion, which is illustrated with Andy Warhol-style cartoon characters who give a happy thumbs-up when they receive their pills in the mail. (A bit more realistically, they seem less happy after swallowing the pills and being greeted with multiple bloody sanitary pads.)

My comments may make it sound like I disapprove of what WoW is doing. The truth is, I don't. If women's lives are being saved with these "Internet abortions," then WoW is doing important work. And there's probably little to be gained by ratcheting up the sadness and guilt for women who have decided to abort a fetus. It's not like I think the how-to video would change women's minds if it were illustrated in a creepy Edward Gorey-style instead. Or that I think women's minds should necessarily be changed.

## My comments may make it sound like I disapprove of what Women on Web is doing. The truth is, I don't.

I just can't help but feel that we've lost something of our humanity when abortion is so self-assuredly reduced to a medical procedure to which we champion universal access ("Share your abortion story!"), without even pausing to acknowledge that a fetus is more significant than an appendix or tonsil.

By contrast, Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic's approaches to abortion seem punitive and anachronistic. The banning of virtually all abortions is no more satisfying than Canada's free-for-all, which does not legally sanction the abortion of fetuses older than all three of my kids were when they were born. I'm not pretending I know where to draw the line. I just think we ought to acknowledge there's good reason for thinking there should be one.

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**Kimberly Dunne**

First it's not YOUR or The Government's job to be moral judge and jury when it comes to health of anyone. It's a decision between a woman and her doctor. Period.

Second: there is no second.

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**Stephane Larose**

Ok fine, but why do I and all the other baby-loving Canadians have to pay (through our taxes) for a woman's unwanted pregnancy.

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**Gary Kenez**

There are a great many items to which government is the "moral judge and jury when it comes to health of anyone". Alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs, education, general health and welfare, the list goes on and on. Any other objections for why this issue does not merit further investigation and discussion?

Like · Reply · 12 · 10 hrs

**Chari Hakucho**

Stephane Larose So true, so true. I could care less that a woman wants to kill her baby, but the fact that tax dollars are paying for the abortion drives me crazy.

Like · Reply · 1 · 10 hrs

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**Gregg Butler** · Chief Executive Officer at Self-Employed

I am a centrist. I believe that abortion should be legal, but I also believe that there should be rules around it. If a woman cannot support having a baby, then abortion is an option...Late term abortions happen, and happen more often that people care to know. And I feel if a baby is mature enough to live outside the womb, then abortion is murder at that point. There are reasons on both sides of the argument.

In Canada we don't have a law around abortion. The topic is so political, that just mentioning it triggers people on either side so that heads explode. Our Liberal party has vowed never to mention it and will boot anyone who does question it.

For me and millions of other people, the discussion is not done and the framework around it needs to be finalized. Finish it and make it morally and equally effective.

Like · Reply · 25 · 12 hrs

**Julie Chant** · Buckeye, Arizona

There is nothing moral about murdering a baby at any stage. Nine months out of your too lazy for birth control life is not much to ask. Then adoption. Why is it OK for a child to die for a parent's convenience? I love your expertise on when a baby becomes a person worthy of carrying to birth. It's not a woman's body, it's a baby's body and soul.

Like · Reply · 6 · 12 hrs

**Mark Bouckaert** · Cardinal Leger

Late term abortions only happen when the woman's life is threatened. Now... having said that, I believe we do need to update our laws around abortion.

Currently, if a woman is 8 months pregnant and her bf/spouse purposely kicks her in the stomach to kill the baby, and succeeds, it's not murder. It should be, because that baby is sentient and could live outside the womb. Every other country sets limits mostly for this reason... in order to further define when a murder happens and we can then prosecute with the correct crime and penalties.

Like · Reply · 8 · 11 hrs

**Leroy Smith** · Works at Retired

How many abortions are done each year in Canada? In 2015, there were just over 100,000 (down from 108,000 in 2011). Of these in 2015, 23,500 were done in a hospital, and 16,000 were done in the first 3 months. The numbers bear out that having an abortion appears to be mainstream birth control. Society has embraced the arbitrary decision that embryos do not constitute human life. If the distinction is that the life form can't live outside of the mother, why does that mean that it shouldn't enjoy the protection of the law? If we can exempt human life at this stage, what's to say that we shouldn't exempt human life in other circumstances? I'm afraid that's where we are heading.

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**Zan St D**

It is biological fact the human is created at conception and delivered 9 months hence or is not. Willfully taking the life of another human is murder. Tricking people into thinking it is not murder was a PR campaign akin to the fabrication of psuedo diseases for the purpose of selling a cure which drug companies in concert with the medical profession do. If the simple right to be born can so easily be taken from us we have no hope as a

Like · Reply · 11 · 11 hrs

**Ted Barnes**

The moment you try to dress your post up with worthless slogans it makes the rest not worth reading. A worthless slogan is "biological fact". A fact is a fact no matter what the topic is. Nor is it a fact that a human (human being) is created at conception. A zygote is and at the moment it is not a human being. Human DNA does not make something human being. The zygote would be considered a human zygote not a human being.

Like · Reply · 3 · 9 hrs

**Suzanne Fortin** · Ottawa, Ontario

Ted Barnes It is indeed a fact that a human being created at conception. A zygote has all the characteristics of an organism. It takes in nutrients, moves, grows, maintains homeostasis. It has Human DNA. In plain English, we call a human organism a human being. Besides, the embryo only remains at the zygote stage for about 24 hours. Abortions aren't done on zygotes. Just sayin'.

Like · Reply · 1 · 7 hrs

**Zan St D**

Ted Barnes you can call it what ever suites your conscience but an abortion ends a human life. If you want to go down Marxist doublethink road and tell me a human is only a human when it is recognized as a human you can, but that would be a specious argument.

Like · Reply · 1 · 7 hrs

[Show 6 more replies in this thread](#)**Chantelle Bryson** · Lawyer at Weiler, Maloney, Nelson

I cannot believe a woman is suggesting that other women go around having late term abortions. Very Trumpesque to assert falsely that women seek late term abortions just because. In fact, they are near non-existent because neither women nor providers will engage in that practice. Late term abortions are only performed in the rare instance of high risk to a woman's life and not even in the case of severe deformity because that is discovered far earlier through standard testing. The statistics speak for themselves and the tragedy of a late term abortion should not be used to unjustifiably fuel mo... [See More](#)

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**Karen Harfield**

Nope. Late term abortions often happen not only because of the woman's health but because of the babies health and expected outcome. I think it goes up to 24-25 weeks in Canada. But you don't get a nuchal translucency (genetic testing till around 12 weeks). And then other things can get picked up via blood tests after that. You have to wait for those results... and then those tests don't diagnose. You have you've sent into a specialists office (which takes time to get in). And then they set up a diagnostic test (which you have to wait to get into). And then get the results from that. And even then they can run further testing to see how bad it is. Often women don't know there is an issue till around 20 weeks plus.

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**Barry Lane** · Owner at 4 Directions Entertainment Ltd.

What has Trump to do with this?

Like · Reply · 2 · 11 hrs

**Cory Arsenault** · Casselman, Ontario

The issue isn't the number of late term abortions there are or for what reason they're done.

The issue is that there is no law preventing somebody from aborting a healthy 9 month old unborn baby.

Like · Reply · 3 · 10 hrs

[Show 8 more replies in this thread](#)**Tim Gleeson** · University of Toronto

"A woman may legally abort a fetus at any stage for any reason. It isn't that I know this approach to be wrong" So in an article on abortion that includes comment on the moral dimension how can it be possible that it is somehow moral to murder an unborn child

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unborn child.

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