Ann Furedi


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.¹

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’.²

Furedi opens the book with an explanation as to why she believes the pro-choice campaign needs 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,

² Ibid., ‘Concluding Thoughts’, p. 145.
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’. 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’.

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, 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.

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.

4 Ibid.