For many years, right-wing anti-abortion proponents have adopted the language and tactics of the Left in order to implement an agenda that rescinds the accomplishments of the latter. Like citizens of a democracy using their freedom to elect a dictator, these activists use the freedom gained through the successes of anti-oppression movements to rebuild oppression. Some have abandoned the religious rhetoric of the past and are now using the language of science and human rights to make their case. They seek a renewed debate on abortion in Canada. They propose changes to legislation that would incrementally chip away at access to abortion by prioritizing the rights of the fetus over the rights of women. But otherwise, the movement is the same as it ever was. The absolute prohibition of abortion remains its goal, and violence underwrites its tactics. Those of us who consider ourselves truly moderate, pro-choice, and progressive Canadians must understand how our best practices, including our respect for free speech and human rights, are being
used by anti-choice groups to undermine the gains we have made in promoting respect for women’s rights.

In a June 2009 article in the National Post about an anti-abortion group called Signal Hill, commentator Charles Lewis refers to the new methods of the anti-choice movement as a “third-way approach.” He quotes Yvonne Douma, the organization’s executive director, as saying that Signal Hill has given up seeking legislation to criminalize abortion and instead wants to “create a Canada where demand for abortions dwindles and decreases until there’s none left—not because it was forced upon anyone, but because that is what women choose.” As Lewis goes on to remark, “For an anti-abortion group, it is a radical approach—relying on soft options of winning hearts and minds rather than hard-hitting campaigns and protests.” In other words, it is radical for an anti-choice group to be moderate. Stephen Harper, our former prime minister, seems to be a proponent of this “third way.” In a January 2011 interview with CBC’s Peter Mansbridge, he declared, “What I say to people, if you want to diminish the number of abortions, you’ve got to change hearts and not laws. And I’m not interested in having a debate over abortion law.” Harper’s lack of interest may be because Canadians generally feel that the issue has been decided and because efforts to enact a law restricting access to abortion have not met with success.

Opening hearts and minds, though, requires ongoing discussion. That is why anti-choice groups in Canada have made reopening the debate on abortion a priority. Calling for debate is a seemingly reasonable request: debate is a tool of democracy, a fair and balanced means of swaying opinion. It is difficult for a moderate person to refuse such a modest request. On the one hand, rejecting debate is seen as intransigent and possibly petulant, as a sign that the side that is refusing discussion is doomed and cannot defend itself. On the other hand, only those interested in upending the status quo on abortion push for a renewed debate. No one else has anything to gain. As the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada has made clear, all requests to reopen the debate are thinly disguised attempts to recriminalize abortion.

Knowing this, pro-choice groups have consistently refused to debate abortion. A typical response, one I have given myself, is, “I don’t debate abortion because abortion is a human right and human rights are not up for debate.” Yet even I have been sucked into debate. While Stephen Harper grandstanded his Maternal Health Initiative in front of the 2010 G8 and G20 summits, an initiative that failed to include abortion care, I agreed to
be part of the Munk Debates to highlight this critical failure. My reasoning was that the debate was not about abortion itself but about the inclusion of funding for abortion care in international aid. But this is exactly the kind of hair-splitting that opens the door for a debate on abortion itself. I should have known better. In fact, the Maternal Health Initiative was a critical wedge used to reopen the debate in Canada, something Harper still denies having done.

The “third way” position is an effort to put a foot in the door and generate talk around the issue. According to Lewis, groups like Signal Hill “want to radically shift the conversation from the polarized rut it has been stuck in for years to something more productive.” What Lewis doesn't say is that Signal Hill and other proponents of the “third way” want to reshape the debate so that it is more productive for them. The tactic has caught on throughout the anti-choice movement, and all parts of it have adopted the language. For example, anti-choice blogger Andrea Mrozek, my opponent in the Munk Debates, represents a “third way” position. According to her blog, ProWomanProLife, she “desires to bring an end to abortion, not by coercion, but by choice.” There is recognition by Signal Hill that even with laws, abortion continues. In the Lewis article, Mrozek concurs with Signal Hill: “My approach was to go after cultural change and pull it out of the legislative arena and not even talk about it or discuss it. Politicians will not take this on anytime soon.”

But when the topic turns to rights, there is no middle ground for Mrozek. In her blog, she states, “It’s not a woman’s right to have an abortion. . . . There’s no such thing as a right to an abortion, not for women, not for men. It doesn’t contribute to women’s rights and freedoms at all, because having an abortion is, put simply, not a right.” Here, Mrozek disagrees with the Supreme Court of Canada, which upheld women’s right to abortion in the 1988 Morgentaler decision. This decision asserts that women must have access to abortion to ensure their right to security of the person and to freedom of conscience, thought, and belief. It says, among other things, that the right to “liberty” contained in s. 7 guarantees to every individual a degree of personal autonomy over important decisions intimately affecting his or her private life. Liberty in a free and democratic society does not require the state to approve such decisions but it does require the state to respect them. A woman’s decision to terminate her pregnancy falls within this class of protected decisions.
While Mrozek is correct in that the word “abortion” isn’t found in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the words that are there have been interpreted to include that right.

Although Signal Hill no longer works toward the change they seek through legal means, other abortion opponents do. For example, in 2014, Conservative MP Jim Hillyer sent out a flyer to his constituents asking, “Do you agree with Jim Hillyer that abortion is NOT a human right?”10 The question lays the groundwork for a future appeal to the objectivity of law in the form of legislation concerning human rights. Another way in which anti-choice groups attempt to unravel the status quo is by taking issue with the use of the word “everyone” in the Charter. The Charter uses the word to describe who is entitled to the rights and freedoms it outlines.11 Anti-choice advocates want to include the fetus in “everyone,” giving the fetus the same protections as women. As a result, anti-choice MPs have attempted, on numerous occasions, to introduce legislation through private members’ bills that would give the fetus the same status as women. For example, a 2008 private member’s bill called the Unborn Victims of Crime Act (C-484) attempted to amend the Criminal Code to allow separate criminal charges to be laid in the case of injury or death of a fetus that results from a pregnant woman being the victim of an offence. Had it passed, this bill would have been a step toward giving “personhood” to the fetus. It did not pass, in part because it would have been an unconstitutional infringement on women’s rights and would probably have resulted in criminalizing pregnant women for behaviours perceived to harm their fetuses.

These efforts obscure an irreconcilable difference between the pro-choice and anti-choice positions. The woman and the fetus are not two separate entities but exist within one body. How can two entities have rights within the same body, and what is to be done if these rights conflict? The Wisdom of Solomon cannot resolve the conflict. Anti-choice advocates privilege the rights of the fetus, while pro-choice advocates privilege the rights of the woman who carries it. If anti-choice advocates such as Mrozek were to state unequivocally that they prioritize the rights of the fetus over those of the woman, they could surely not claim to be pro-woman at the same time, at least not beyond supporting a woman in her very narrowly defined role in reproduction. To Mrozek and her allies, there is only one important right at stake—the right of the fetus to be born.
At the same time as this irreconcilable difference is ignored, anti-choice proponents promote a philosophical paradigm in which the woman and her fetus are in conflict. In doing so, they assert that such conflict needs to be resolved by someone other than the woman, because she may choose an abortion. She cannot be trusted to make a choice that favours the fetus. The organization We Need a Law, another group working toward recriminalization, focuses on enacting new laws to protect the fetus. In its mission statement, We Need a Law claims that as “the only nation in the Western world without abortion legislation,” Canada needs to “fall into step” with other nations and “enact a law that protects pre-born humans.” The group further asserts that Canada’s lack of an abortion law “is a sad reflection on a country that prides itself on a high standard of human rights” and that this “egregious violation of rights against pre-born children needs to be addressed.” Again, the rights of the “pre-born” are privileged over the rights of the “post-born.” The rights of the “post-born” are not in the organization’s bailiwick.

But as former prime minister Stephen Harper and others have admitted, getting a law, getting “the” law, is unlikely. Like the 2008 effort to include the fetus as a possible victim of crime, another backbench initiative, introduced in 2012 as Motion 312, asked Parliament to study medical evidence about when life begins. Instead of going straight to a demand for new legislation to recriminalize abortion or prohibit it, the author of the motion, Stephen Woodworth, then a Conservative MP, took a step backwards in the process. All he wanted was a committee to determine when a fetus becomes human. It is likely that, had the motion passed, such a committee would have asserted that zygotes, embryos, and fetuses are human beings from conception since they possess human DNA. (But the reasoning is nonsensical because an eyelash or a malignant tumour also includes human DNA.) One imagines that at that point, Woodworth and his allies would have asked Parliament to change the Criminal Code to reflect the new definition and scientific evidence. But the motion conflates the legal issue of personhood with a medical understanding of what it means to be human. In doing so, the motion is intended to be a first step to giving the fetus legal personhood, at which point it would be entitled to human rights, a cause that would then be taken up with gusto by those on the Right. Again, the fact that such rights would subordinate the rights of pregnant women is not their concern. As Gordon O’Connor, then the Conservative Party whip, said while speaking against the motion.
in the House, “The ultimate intention of this motion is to restrict abortions in Canada at some fetal development stage.”

The call for a seemingly unbiased committee to define “human” is appealing, then, but only until one remembers that it obscures the real dilemma of potentially having two entities with (possibly conflicting) rights existing in one body. It might also seem reasonable because it is an improvement on the violence that characterizes the so-called pro-life movement. For years we have seen women harangued and harassed for exercising their legal rights; clinics targeted and bombed; and doctors threatened, injured, and murdered by anti-choice activists who claim to speak for the “pre-born.” Although anti-choice groups are generally quick to denounce the violence within their movement and distance themselves from perpetrators, they benefit from the culture of fear that the violence creates. A bully needs only to throw an occasional punch to maintain dominance, whether in the schoolyard or in wider society. One of the results of this violence is that pro-choice advocates are sometimes reluctant to engage with those who are anti-choice, knowing that others who have done so have been targeted with hate mail, harassment, and physical violence. It is tempting to let an unknown “committee” settle the question instead of risking one’s personal safety. As Sam Harris writes in Letter to a Christian Nation, “Our fear of provoking religious hatred has rendered us unwilling to criticize ideas that are increasingly maladaptive and patently ridiculous.”

All of the “third way” strategies considered thus far are blatantly evident in one of the least moderate anti-choice groups in Canada, the Canadian Centre for Bio-ethical Reform (CCBR). It too uses “third way” language. The group’s name infers its assertion that the “bio-ethics” of Canadians are in need of reform. Such reform would privilege the rights of the fetus. “Bio-ethical” is an interesting choice of words. Again, it has secular appeal. The “bio” makes it appear scientific and a matter for academics rather than theologians.

The CCBR’s tagline is “See it. Believe it. End it.” Like its American cousin, the Center for Bio-ethical Reform, the CCBR considers abortion the greatest evil of our time and is dedicated to “making abortion unthinkable,” a phrase that is ubiquitous on the group’s website. Although a disclaimer runs across the bottom of its home page saying it denounces violence, the CCBR seems to have a limited understanding of what constitutes violence. In more socially progressive contexts, we understand that violence doesn’t always leave a physical mark. Violence can be emotional, psychological, and verbal. In this
wider context, some CCBR tactics can be considered violent. For example, in its Genocide Awareness Project (GAP), the CCBR uses graphic imagery to equate legal abortion with genocide. GAP activists set up graphic sidewalk displays of allegedly aborted fetuses next to images of victims of the Holocaust, lynchings in the American south, and other genocides. They place these displays in high traffic areas, near abortion clinics, in front of pro-choice sexual health centers, in schools, and at the entrances to events that are likely to draw a crowd, including family events such as the Calgary Stampede. Passersby come upon the images without warning. No attempts are made to prevent children from seeing the images, and they do—these are public spaces.

The graphic nature of the displays is designed to provoke and trigger distress, which it does. Carol Williams and Don Gill explain that the tactics of the Genocide Awareness Project should make us wary. Wrenching images from their specific historical context and attaching them to an unrelated cause is a tactic of propaganda. Williams and Gill explain that GAP proponents “exploit unsuspecting younger or naïve viewers who may have little familiarity with the history or motivations of lynchings or the Holocaust. Targeted are those who may be visually unsophisticated in the sense they possess only a nascent capability to interrogate the immersive excess” of the images.16

The CCBR recycles the GAP display in mailings and often meets resistance. For example, in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, a petition was started to ban the distribution of the images. The mayor, who called them “repulsive and disrespectful to the community,” said he could not enact a bylaw prohibiting the distribution of the images because his lawyers advised that it would not withstand a Charter challenge.17 The CCBR also hangs banners on highway overpasses and has been allowed to do so despite the existence of laws against “stunting” (any act along a highway that can distract a driver) that exist in every provincial highway traffic act. Complaints from drivers about the distraction—and at least one accident—prompted the city of Hamilton, Ontario, to pass a bylaw against the practice.18

The use of graphic imagery is hardly new or original. The government uses graphic imagery to deter people from smoking when it puts images of cancer on cigarette packages. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) uses graphic imagery of victims at accident scenes to deter driving while under the influence of alcohol. In these cases, the images are also meant to
change “hearts and minds” rather than laws. However, unlike those images, the graphic images of the CCBR are often thought to defy “community standards” as defined by the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards. They target women for discrimination and potentially incite hatred by equating women with the perpetrators of genocide. To date, the CCBR’s right to free speech has been upheld. But even Bishop Frederick Henry, the current bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary, Alberta, has denounced the tactics of this group, calling them a “violation of human dignity” and saying, "In no way may these pictures be construed as healing, nor can the project be described as ‘tough love,’ and I am not in favour of this kind of pedagogy. In my opinion it does more harm than good to the pro-life cause."

A favourite place for the CCBR to set up the displays is on university campuses. A student at the University of British Columbia was inspired to strip naked in front of the display to make a statement about her right to control her own body. The student captures the essence of why the display is so deeply offensive in a blog post about the incident:

They are saying that a woman who chooses to terminate her pregnancy is akin to Nazis, terrorists, Klu [sic] Klux Klan members and the Santebal—all groups which set out to systematically destroy or enslave entire groups of people out of a sense of God-given superiority. And it is not just a woman who actually has an abortion who is labelled as—at the very least—a cog in a genocide machine. The implication is that anyone who supports a woman’s right to choose is also participating in mass, organized murder, and that the very act of supporting the right to choose is violent and inherently evil.

At some universities, attempts have been made to ban the display and these have resulted in expensive and protracted legal battles over free speech. Jane Kirby, in an article for Briarpatch titled “Freedom of (Hate) Speech,” describes the dangers of the GAP approach:

These presentations and displays have provoked a pro-choice response in a way the activities of other anti-choice groups have not. Pro-choice activists find the activities of the CCBR particularly inflammatory and dangerous because of the extent to which they demonize women who have had, or who support the right to have, abortions. When abortion is equated not only with murder but with genocide, women who have had an abortion are cast as perpetrators of vicious and systematic violence. For women who have had abortions, confronting this portrayal
can be an emotionally distressing experience, as it’s intended to be. More importantly, some pro-choice activists fear that the comparison invites, or could fuel, extremist violence against pro-choice organizations and advocates.\textsuperscript{22}

Williams and Gill note that the CCBR “conceives the university as a ‘marketplaces of ideas’” and uses the GAP display “to market extremism.”\textsuperscript{23} Universities, however, need to be concerned with the ethical production of knowledge, and they violate their mandate when they promote pernicious historical misrepresentations as “just another idea.” Unlike a municipality, a university has ample and varied resources to counter misinformation.

The New Abortion Caravan is yet another project of the CCBR, and it, too, misrepresents history, although in a much less egregious way. It explicitly co-opts and perverts the historic Abortion Caravan, a successful feminist project of the Vancouver Women’s Caucus in 1970. The Abortion Caravan is often credited with galvanizing the emerging women’s movement in Canada and with ultimately bringing an end to the criminalization of abortion. It is therefore a target for CCBR wrath. In the summer of 2012, the CCBR literally took their show on the road and drove panel vans bearing the usual graphic images along the route of the original Abortion Caravan to Ottawa. They stopped in the same towns along the way. The organization’s embrace of third-way tactics in is evident in the strategy outlined on their website, as well as in the deceptively moderate language used to describe it:

In each city, the media will inevitably be compelled to cover the abortion issue once again as the New Abortion Caravan passes through. The presence of the dismembered pre-born victims will force Canadians and the media to recognize their plight. The historical resonance of the New Abortion Caravan confronting the injustices brought about by the original Abortion Caravan will force people to re-examine their conceptions about abortion.\textsuperscript{24}

The CCBR justifies its use of graphic imagery in various ways but, oddly, not by aligning itself with a tradition of similar advocacy from groups like MADD. With the New Abortion Caravan, they applied “tit for tat” reasoning, arguing that the women who took part in the original Abortion Caravan, women they refer to as “abortion advocates,” also “used vivid imagery—coffins and coat hangers—to draw attention away from the pre-born and force politicians and the public to focus on the women in front of them.”\textsuperscript{25}
The implication is that they are doing the same thing that the Vancouver Women’s Caucus did. But the comparison of the gory imagery used by the CCBR and imagery used by the original Abortion Caravan is hardly that of apples to apples. The Abortion Caravan vehicles were decorated, and one carried a black coffin representing all of the women who had died in botched abortions. There were banners, one of which read, “We Are Furious Women.”

In Ottawa, after rallying on Parliament Hill, some of the Caravan’s members went to the home of then prime minister Pierre Trudeau and delivered the tools of a home abortion kit they had carried with them on their journey. The Caravaners also left their coffin behind on the lawn of 24 Sussex Drive. The following Monday, they disrupted Parliament for over a half an hour, chaining themselves to seats in the gallery and reciting speeches. It was the first time that Parliament in Canada had ever been forced to stop.

In a CBC *Daybreak* interview with Margo Dunn, one of the original Abortion Caravaners, host Chris Walker, voiced the perspective of the CCBR: “Along the way, you used some of what, at the time especially, were shocking tactics.” He mentioned the illegal abortion kit and said that the new Caravan is different but the tactics are similar. Dunn disagreed: “What we didn’t do, I mean, I see these images, as a kind of pornography. . . . But we didn’t use scare tactics in that particular kind of way. We always attempted to, as the suffragists did, act with dignity.” Walker did not give up on this line of questioning: “Abortion is such a personal and deeply divisive topic where, it seems to me, people of honest conscience can come to different conclusions. Why is it wrong for this group to use methods to argue what they believe?”

The implication again is that the imagery used by the two Caravans are equivalent and that the CCBR is doing nothing that the original Caravan did not do.

If the original Caravan had used images of dead women, exposed and crumpled on bathroom floors in pools of blood as a result of botched abortions or bleeding out on kitchen tables with their legs splayed apart, the comparison would be valid. The “vivid imagery” of the Abortion Caravan was symbolic and did not exploit or objectify anybody, pre-born or otherwise.

The “vivid imagery” of the Abortion Caravan included the performance of skits:

The mimed performance illustrated the unequal and cruel treatment meted out to women who applied for legal abortions under the new law. Three “doctors,” representing a hospital Therapeutic Abortion
Committee, stood with their hands thrust through a large piece of cardboard that was hung by a cord around their necks. Another “sympathetic doctor” presented this “board” with anxious women, wearing identifying signs. The shabbily dressed “Mother of Six” was summarily turned down for an abortion, as the TAC doctors wound her in red tape and thrust forth signs saying “NO.” An applicant with “German Measles” and one who had been raped met the same fate. A user of the Catholic method of birth control wore a sign saying, “I Got Rhythm”; she was also turned down. But when a woman appeared in a fur coat, with a “Silver Spoon” in her mouth and handfuls of money, the TAC doctors signaled “Yes.”

The imagery seems somewhat quaint today.

In contrast, the images and tactics used by the CCBR are violent. According to Stephanie Gray, then CCBR’s executive director, the images are absolutely necessary. Canadians must see them, no matter how upsetting they are. “Abortion is tolerated by the Canadian public because it is invisible to them,” she says. “We use our graphic projects to make the victims of abortion visible, showing abortion as an act of violence that kills a baby, so that abortion becomes an unthinkable option.”

Gray described an incident at one of their Caravan’s stops that eerily echoes domestic abuse, citing it as part of a “positive response” to the display, in which they “helped connect a woman with a support group to help her cope with a previous abortion, after she burst into tears upon seeing the placards.”

This can be spun another way. A woman who had an abortion came across the images, and after calling her a genocidal murderer, her abusers, like any textbook abuser, told her that they cared and set her up for potentially more indoctrination and abuse.

In any case, it is hard to imagine that abortion is invisible to Canadians. Thirty-one percent of Canadian women who turned forty-five in 2005 have had an abortion at some point in their life. Abortion is a topic to which we often return, as is capital punishment, gun control, and prayer in school. It is one of the issues that voters use to help them distinguish and define the beliefs of political candidates. It is widely understood as an issue that tells us something critical about a constellation of related beliefs. If I want to get a sense of who someone is, asking them how they feel about abortion can be a quick, if not necessarily accurate, shortcut.
The images used by the CCBR are not the only images of abortion in existence. The Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada has posted other stock images available for media use that are quite different and have a different impact. They include a photo of a blastocyst—an early embryo—at five weeks next to a ruler indicating that it is about two to three centimeters across. Such images are downright boring compared to the highly manipulated images of the GAP display. Some might argue that the former, too, are propaganda. Perhaps so. Various media have a habit of placing an image of obviously pregnant women, often women almost at term, with articles about abortion. Since most women have the procedure very early in their pregnancy, such images are entirely inappropriate and even misleading. If we can admit that everything is political, we can also admit that some things are more political than others.

Whether or not pro-choice advocates wish to fight a battle of images is beside the point, and challenging the veracity of the CCBR’s images is only likely to result in more protracted legal battles. Whether we are looking at a minute blob of tissue or a gory image of an allegedly aborted fetus, the fact that we don’t generally look at images of the procedure or the products of conception is not a surprise. We tend not to look at images of heart transplants or knee replacements either. As a patient, I don’t need to watch a video of a procedure before I have it, and generally, I would prefer not to. My preference to avoid such images does not make the procedure any less necessary. Nor does a preference not to look at images of an abortion procedure mean that women who support or choose abortion are in any kind of denial about what abortion means to us, our individual consciences, our families, and our lives. As Charlotte Taft has said, “Women who have abortions do so because they value life and because they take very seriously the myriad responsibilities that come not just with birth, but with nurturing a human being.”

It would be hard to overstate or exaggerate the hyperbolic rhetoric of the New Abortion Caravan Web page. It speaks for itself. It calls the participants “a team of young people who are survivors—all born at a time when their peers were being killed.” The word “survivor” tends to be associated with tragedies such as the Holocaust, and is also typically associated with living through illness (particularly cancer) or abuse. To be a survivor is also to be a victim, and that is why many progressive people are moving away from using the word to describe people. The appropriation of the term by the
CCBR is part of the explicit comparison between legal abortion and genocide. According to the site,

Over 3 million Canadian children have been brutally dismembered, decapitated, and disembowelled through abortion. Our taxes pay for this grotesque human rights violation. . . .

In 1970, the Abortion Caravan heralded the arrival of a great injustice. But in 2012, the New Abortion Caravan will make the victims of Canada’s abortion holocaust visible to the entire country. The New Abortion Caravan will signal the beginning of the end of Canada’s . . . wholesale, state-funded slaughter of the youngest members of our society.34

The language indicates that CCBR members and supporters consider every birth a victory—evidence that somehow all the young people alive today survived despite the fact that abortion exists. In their fantasy world, every woman contemplates abortion with every pregnancy, and every birth is an event that somehow “slipped by” the abortionists.

The organization also draws attention to any opposition, positioning its supporters again as victims of wrongdoing. Referring to an “assault” in which CCBR protesters were doused with chocolate milk by a passerby who was incensed that his three-year-old had seen the images, Gray said, “We will continue with our tour regardless of violence or threats of opposition because someone has to speak for the pre-born children who cannot speak for themselves.”35 The passerby spent a night in jail, and the CCBR has highlighted this incident on its website, characterizing itself as the victim. Anti-choice groups appear to be very concerned with their safety. It is common for participants in the GAP displays to film passersby and take photos. Perhaps they want to be able to identify future chocolate milk assailants. In the United States, anti-choice groups train their members to track licence plates and take descriptions of people approaching clinics so that they can differentiate between clients and staff and determine whether a woman has come back and had an abortion or has not come back and possibly decided against it.36 They would consider the latter a victory. The other possible uses to which this information could be put are cause for concern. Although there is never a justification for violence, being doused with chocolate milk is hardly the same as being murdered in your own church in front of friends and family while taking up the collection, the fate of Dr. George Tiller, one of the few providers of late-term abortions in the United States, nor does it compare
with the shootings of Canadian doctors Garson Romalis, Hugh Short, or Jack Fainman or the 1992 firebombing of the Morgentaler Clinic in Toronto. But in describing the chocolate milk incident, the site, referring to the passerby’s young child, claims,

This little girl is the perfect illustration of what pro-life activists have found to be true time and time again: Children have functioning consciences. When they see a dismembered baby, they want to know what happened, and who allowed it to happen. They do not get disturbed by the pictures so much as the obscene language and temper tantrums of their parents.\(^\text{37}\)

Releasing themselves from any responsibility for traumatizing the child, the CCBR and its supporters displace the blame for any trauma onto the angry parent. They appropriate his role as parent, taking away his ability to introduce to his child complex issues surrounding life, death, and sexuality at a time he deems appropriate. The group has consistently refused to position its display in a way that would give passersby a choice about whether to view it. Even the CCBR’s American counterpart has a seven-second warning on their main page prior to the start of their graphic video. The Canadian group does not offer even this opportunity to look away. This could speak to their desperation.

In 2012, Andrea Mrozek embedded a New Abortion Caravan video (which has since been “removed as a violation of YouTube’s policy on shocking and disgusting content”) into her own ProWomanProLife blog and wrote,

Be forewarned that this YouTube clip about the start of this new campaign has graphic content. I know our readers are split on whether to use graphic content like this. However, in overturning the old status quo the “angry women” who wanted abortion certainly used graphics—what do you call dumping a coffin in front of the Prime Minister’s residence? Killing is bloody and messy. Therefore, abortion is bloody and messy. While I don’t use those posters myself, I do support those who do, because I believe it reminds the complacent and the apathetic that abortion is the killing of a human being, something our country chooses not to notice or care about.\(^\text{38}\)

Again, an anti-choice proponent equates one type of imagery with the other. And although Mrozek says she does not use these images herself, she does exactly that by embedding them in her blog. Furthermore, she admits that
she supports the tactics of the CCBR. She tries to have it both ways here, indicating that her “moderate” stance is merely a way to wedge the door open for the typical radicalism of the anti-choice movement.

The CCBR also highlights the use of the word “everyone” in the Charter (a tactic discussed above). Stephanie Gray and the CCBR feel that it applies to the “pre-born” as much as it does to a toddler. In Winnipeg, as the Canadian Museum for Human Rights was being built in that city, Gray said that “abortion is Canada’s greatest human-rights violation.” She repeated this in an interview on CBC’s Daybreak. In a telling moment, Gray was asked what the punishment should be for a woman who has an abortion. She replied, “Once abortion becomes illegal, I would say the consequences for a woman who has an abortion at that point, breaking the law, would be no different from the consequences for a woman who kills her born children.” When the interviewer asked if this would mean life in prison, Grey added that it depends, and said that some women who have abortions might instead be considered “clinically insane,” like women who “drown their kids in a bathtub.”

On her ProWomanProLife blog, Mrozek explains her position against seeking legislation: “I don’t know a single person who thinks about what should be a legal punishment for an abortion doctor and I don’t know a single pro-lifer who thinks the woman should be put in jail for going to have an abortion.” I guess she has never met Stephanie Gray.

For secular and pro-choice Canadians, it is difficult to resist the call for debate, especially when the terms of the debate have left God behind and focus instead on human rights and Charter rights. Calls for a “rational” debate are coming from many quarters now. In an article for This Magazine about the New Abortion Caravan, writer Kyle Dupont expresses surprise that this New Abortion Caravan is “pro-life” and worries about the tactics. “If we are to have a debate,” he writes, “we should strive to make both sides of the debate respectful. There needs to be some kind of line drawn; without it there is no telling how far shock value may go.” His call for moderation implies that there is moderation to be found in the CCBR. There is not. The very act of debating implies that minds can be changed. Changing minds appears unlikely in this case. To attempt to change a mind on abortion is, according to Walter Benn Michaels, akin to an attempt at religious conversion. There is little hope for success. Lines are sharply drawn.
Encouraging people to be respectful, as Dupont does, is laudable, but it can do nothing to alter the fact that our differences are irreconcilable. Sometimes, there is no middle ground to be found. In this case, the fetus is a person, or it is not. The woman is entitled to rights, or she is not. The best we can do is “agree to disagree.” But anti-choice activists will not settle for that. Anti-choice perspectives will continue to perpetuate the inferiority of women. They will continue to sacrifice women’s rights for those of the fetus. While some may accuse pro-choice activists of being just as rigid as their opponents, this is not the case, for there is moderation to be found in the pro-choice stance. The very nature of the pro-choice position asserts both a woman’s right to an abortion and her right not to have one. It asserts a woman’s right to give birth, or not to give birth, as she sees fit. As Gordon O’Connor said in Parliament, speaking against Motion 312:

> Whether one accepts it or not, abortion is and always will be part of society. There will always be dire situations in which some women may have to choose the option of abortion. No matter how many laws some people may want government to institute against abortion, abortion cannot be eliminated. It is part of the human condition.

> I cannot understand why those who are adamantly opposed to abortion want to impose their beliefs on others by way of the Criminal Code. There is no law that says that a woman must have an abortion. No one is forcing those who oppose abortion to have one.

> Within the free and democratic society of Canada, if one has a world view based on a personal moral code that is somewhat different from others, then live according to those views as long as they are within the current laws. On the other hand, citizens who are also living within the reasonable limits of our culture and who may not agree with another’s particular moral principles should not be compelled to follow them by the force of a new law.45

Or, in the pithy words of the pro-choice movement, “If you’re against abortion, don’t have one.”

Being pro-choice is the most moderate position we can take in a civil and democratic society on this issue. The alternative results in what activists and others have deemed a war on women. Such a war is already evident in the United States. According to the Guttmacher Institute, two hundred and eighty-two restrictive laws on abortion have been enacted in the United States since 2010.46 These laws have made it extremely difficult and
sometimes impossible for many American women to access abortion services. Molly Redden, writing for *Mother Jones*, found that despite *Roe v. Wade*, conservatives in the US have been able to fundamentally rewrite abortion laws and “the onslaught of new abortion restrictions has been so successful, so strategically designed, and so well coordinated that the war in many places has essentially been lost.” In Canada, those involved in the anti-choice movement seek the same outcome. They are determined to end abortion and will welcome incursions on women’s rights to achieve that goal. The “third way” is nothing more than new packaging on old goals; goals which pose the same threat to women’s life, liberty, and security as they ever did and expose women, abortion providers, clinic workers, and pro-choice advocates to abuse. Truly moderate, pro-choice, and progressive Canadians must continue to support the gains we have made in assuring women’s rights and push for access to abortion services throughout Canada, particularly in places where women are underserved. Most importantly, we must continue to challenge the agenda, be it “bio-ethical” or otherwise, of those who would have us deny women their rights.

Notes


3 According to a July 2014 poll taken shortly after New Brunswick’s one and only private abortion clinic, Fredericton’s Morgentaler Clinic, announced its plans to close because it could not afford to continue operating without funding from the province, 59 percent of those polled indicated that they were “fine” with Canada’s lack of a law restricting access to abortions. Angus Reid Global, “Canadians Express Little Desire to Re-introduce Abortion Laws in Their Country,” 21 July 2014, http://angusreidglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ARG-Abortion-2014.pdf.


5 Lewis, “BC Anti-Abortion Group Takes Radical Stance.”

Quoted in Lewis, “BC Anti-Abortion Group Takes Radical Stance.”

Mrozek, “Story.”


Indeed, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not grant a specific right to abortion in that the specific word is never used. But to make such an argument as Mrozek does is to misunderstand the purpose of the Charter. The Charter offers Canadians a framework within which more specific decisions can be made consistent with principles it upholds. According to section 2: “Every person has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association.” Section 7 goes on to state, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.” See “Constitution Act, 1982: Part 1, Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,” Justice Laws Website, 2015, http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html.


One often hears such denouncements of violence from the anti-choice groups that the media turn to for comments on abortion-related issues that arise from time to time. Journalists justify quoting the opinions of such groups on the grounds that doing so provides balance to a story. What balance is there, however, when views espoused by, say 20 percent of the population (at best) are given 50 percent of the column space?


Williams and Gill, “Visual Spectacle as Propaganda.”


Ibid.


34 Ibid.
42 Lewis, “BC Anti-abortion Group Takes Radical Stance.”


45 O’Connor, “Private Members’ Business.”
