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# “Rights Talk” Collides with Right and Wrong

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Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon warned years ago that a contagion of “rights talk” was ruining our ability to conduct a serious moral discussion. When every major issue is reduced to “rights,” the moral considerations go into a melt-down. When rights inevitably conflict and collide, there is no way to resolve the problem.

A clear example of this is found in developments at the Commission on the Status of Women, an organization of the United Nations. As Douglas A. Sylva reports in The Weekly Standard, an effort to save baby girls “ran afoul of dominant feminist orthodoxy.” He explains:

*The Bush administration introduced a resolution condemning the killing of girls, because they are girls. Such acts include old-fashioned infanticide, the kind of cultural practice the British tried to stamp out in the bygone days of colonial India, as well as the evermore popular use of modern sonogram technology in order to identify and eliminate girls before they are born—what is called sex-selective abortion.*

*And this is where the United States met the opposition of the European Union and its allies: abortion-on-demand orthodoxy seems to mean women’s total freedom to choose, even if that choice eliminates the next generation of women, for the very reason that they are women.*

Experts now estimate that there are over 100-million missing girls and women — baby girls either aborted in the womb or killed as infants. They are being killed only because they are girls.

Sylva gets right to the point:

*It is perhaps obvious why sex-selective abortion is an embarrassment to feminism: while the preference for sons is deeply rooted in history, the other factors, such as reduced family size and cultural acceptance of abortion, are central pillars of feminist thought. Since at least the 1995 Beijing Women’s Conference, feminist champions have argued that international “gender justice” could only be established if women possessed the reproductive rights necessary to reduce their family sizes, thereby liberating them for higher education and successful careers. This is as close to established wisdom as is found at the United Nations, and it is so dominant that there is even a phrase—the “gender perspective” —suggesting that all problems, from peace keeping, to land mine removal, to water supply management, could be solved if they were examined through this proper feminist point-of-view.*

*So imagine the shock and shame when it became obvious that many of these newly-liberated women have been using their liberty to abort their own unborn girls. Research has even suggested that sex-selective abortion is especially prevalent among rich, urban, educated women in China, the pioneers, the type of women presumably leading the world into a genderless future. It is never pleasant to be forced to admit that one’s revolutionaries have begun to devour their own.*

An absolute “right” to an abortion for any reason or no reason at all — a cardinal principle of modern feminism — runs right into the fact that this means the killing of females by the millions. The United Nations, a body as obsessed with rights as any other, cannot even respond with coherent moral outrage.



No structure of “rights” can long survive without a clear and substantial moral foundation. In other words, matters of right and wrong must come before claims to abstract “rights.” Just ask the millions of missing baby girls.



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