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Shifting Ground on the Abortion Issue?

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Columnist Richard Cohen of *The Washington Post* now admits that he has grave doubts about abortion. In a fascinating [opinion column](#) published in today's edition of the *Post*, Cohen recounts his experience of arranging an abortion for a friend of a friend who had become pregnant. "With little thought, I did so," he explains. "She went home to Germany and I never saw her again."

But, that was then and this is now. "I would do things a bit differently now," he reflects. "I would give the matter much more thought. I no longer see abortion as directly related to sexual freedom or feminism, and I no longer see it strictly as a matter of personal privacy, either. It entails questions about life — maybe more so at the end of the process than at the beginning, but life nonetheless."

Consider these two paragraphs: *This is not a fashionable view in some circles, but it is one that usually gets grudging acceptance when I mention it. I know of no one who has flipped on the abortion issue, but I do know of plenty of people who no longer think of it as a minor procedure that only prudes and right-wingers oppose. The antiabortion movement has made headway.*

That shift in sentiment is not apparent in polls because they do not measure doubt, only position: for or against. But between one and the other, black or white, is a vast area of gray where up or down, yes or no, fades to questions about circumstance: Why, what month, etc.? Whatever the case, the very basis of the Roe v. Wade decision — the one that grounds abortion rights in the Constitution — strikes many people now as faintly ridiculous. Whatever abortion may be, it cannot simply be a matter of privacy.

Cohen is not ready to join the pro-life movement, but he can no longer see abortion as a mere privacy issue. He claims to "support choice," but believes that the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision was wrongly decided.

The Washington Post is resolutely pro-abortion, especially on its editorial pages. Nevertheless, this column by Richard Cohen, along with the [article](#) by Patricia E. Bauer that ran in Tuesday's edition of the paper [[see my article](#)], indicates that the *Post* is at least willing to allow some discussion of the issue. This is progress.

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