

# OpenTheo

## The Economics of Abortion in One Lesson

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### Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

In this Episode from an written for Christ Over All, Kevin discusses the moral and economic affects that abortion has on mothers, families, and women.

### Transcript

[Music] Greetings and Salutations. This is Life and Books and Everything. I'm Kevin DeYoung.

Today I want to read an article for a website called Christ Over All. Go there [Christovertime.com](http://Christovertime.com). It's a fellowship of pastor theologians dedicated to helping the church see Christ as Lord and everything else under His feet. Some friends of mine are a part of this.

It's a group of reformed baptists and they have put out a new issue online, which is 50 years after Roe v. Wade. And so this is looking at the issue of abortion after Dobbs and remembering the anniversary 1973, 50 years later of Roe v. Wade asked me to write an article on the economics of abortion. I think you'll see what this article is about.

It's called the economics of abortion in one lesson. Henry Haslett's classic book Economics in One Lesson from 1946 actually delivered on the audacious title. Quote, "The art of economics," Roe Haslett, "consists in looking not merely at the immediate but at the longer effects of any act or policy.

It consists in tracing the consequences of that policy not merely for one group but for all groups." That is to say, the lesson of economics is that we have to look at the effects and the stories that are harder to see but no less real and important. Haslett insisted that economics was haunted by the fallacy of overlooking secondary consequences. In this famous example, Haslett imagines a young hoodlum who leaves a brick or heaves a brick through the window of a baker shop.

The shopkeeper is understandably furious but soon the crowd that has gathered begins to postulate that the smashed window may actually be a great blessing. After all the

broken window will mean new business for the glacier. That is a window repair who will then have an extra \$250 to spend with other merchants who will intern him or money to spend on other goods and services.

The naughty boy who seemed at first to be a public menace turns out to be a public benefactor. But not so fast, argued Haslett. True, the broken window will mean more business for the glacier and he will spend that money in other ways.

But the \$250 had to come from somewhere and in this case it came from the shopkeeper that was money he could have spent with other merchants and on other goods and services. At the very least the economic benefit is nil. The shopkeeper's pain is the glacier's gain.

It's worse than that however. Nothing new was created in the repair of the shop window. No new employment was added, no new productivity was achieved.

If smashing windows is the secret to a growing economy then war would be the best thing to befall a country. But of course it's not. Perhaps war's destruction might prove good business for construction companies and road contractors but that's only if we look at what is right in front of us.

What we can't see are the people with less money because they've been taxed to pay for the new construction. We can't see all the other things they might have done with that money. We can't see how people would have been put to more useful work had the city not been leveled.

We can't see the people bombed out of their homes, huddled in a temporary shelter, paid for by donations or by more taxes. In short, we see the obvious but we ignore the secondary consequences. The same fallacy is at work when it comes to economics and abortion.

Of course, abortion is fundamentally wrong because life begins at conception. Every human life is made in the image of God and innocent persons have a God given right to life. So even if abortion made great economic sense, abortion would still be wrong.

But let's think about the economic argument on its own merits. Many people argue that access to abortion is necessary because it helps women escape poverty and destitution. In its best form, the argument might go like this.

Abortion isn't desirable, but sometimes it is the only way to avoid a life of extreme want. Without access to abortion, too many women will be forced to bear children into the world that they can't afford. The result is economic impoverishment for the child and for the woman.

Abortion is an economic good without which women would be made much worse off.

How should we respond to this line of thinking? For starters, we might respond from the child's point of view that life is better than not living. Given the choice, I believe most of us prefer difficult circumstances to death.

We might also ask the question whether any argument that can be used to justify killing children in the womb, with the sake of economic benefit, can be used just as logically to justify killing children outside the womb. I can tell you from experience, children are least expensive when they first arrive. The real economic burdens come later.

Can children therefore be snuffed out at 6 or 16, or only at 6 weeks in the womb when the economic burden is leased? But more to the point, the economic argument in favor of abortion fails to take into account has let's one economic lesson. It is easy to think how an individual woman might benefit economically from not having to provide for a child. It's harder to see are all of the devastating economic incentives that abortion puts in motion.

The presence of widespread legal, easily accessible abortion reinforces the narrative that men do not have control over their sexual appetites and that men should not be expected to fulfill their responsibilities as fathers. Far from empowering women, abortion empowers men to expect, if not outright demand, that sexual activity should be free from any consequences. This in turn, disincentivizes men from considering marriage in the first place, which is the surest way to impoverish women.

Abortion does for the poor what gambling does for the poor. Legalized gambling looks like an opportunity to escape poverty, but the social costs of gambling, lost productivity, lost employment, illness, divorce, abuse, neglect are massive. Likewise, abortion looks like an economic gain, but only if we refuse to look at the larger social costs.

Overwhelmingly, abortions in America are procured by single women. 85% of the women who had abortions in 2019 were unmarried. This may seem like a reason women need abortion access, but that argument fails to address the larger ways in which abortion cheapens sex undermines marriage and puts pressure on women to acquiesce to a male-centered view of the sex that views sexual intimacy as centered on physical gratification rather than ordered to family formation and child rearing.

For abortion looks like a socioeconomic cure, it is only first because it is a major component of the disease. This is to say nothing of the lost economic activity that comes as a result of removing millions of potential American workers from the labor force and tax base. Should abortion become less available and more stigmatized, some women will feel that as economic pain in the short term, but the long-term socioeconomic gains will be significant.

In the biggest winners, women themselves.

[Music]