

Nicole Guidi

Professor Little and Stannard

HN-300-C

16 March 2021

### Ethics of Abortion

Abortion is one of the most controversial subjects that is debated on a daily basis for its ethical standing as well as its theological perspectives. Abortion surrounds conversations all over the world, but especially in the United States. One of the main causes for abortion is an unintended pregnancy. A statistic that shows 121 million unintended pregnancies occurred yearly between 2015 and 2019 and 61% of these ended in abortion (Guttmacher, 2020). Obviously, there are two sides to every controversial topic leading abortion to have a pro-life argument as well as a pro-choice argument meaning against abortion and for abortion respectively. The pro-life side of abortion has several reasons including ethics as well as religion to defend why the act is unacceptable. If not properly taking care of a child during pregnancy is immoral, such as not consuming alcohol and other toxins, then so is abortion regardless if the fetus is considered a person or not (Hendricks, 2018). On the other hand, the pro-choice side of abortion has many reasons to defend the act as well. Welfare participation has been directly correlated to abortion with studies to provide evidence (Hussey, 2011). Child well-being is observed in states with strict abortion laws also having studies to show the effects of strict abortion laws on the well-being of children (Medoff, 2016). The pro-life paradox also explains that abortion practitioners feel as though they saved many unborn souls in removing them from human temptation and allowing a peaceful travel to heaven (Thomas, 2016). Lastly, the feminist approach of sociology states that women should have a right to control what happens to their bodies meaning they

should not be restricted from deciding to terminate their pregnancy. Lastly, contraceptives are a means to avoid a pregnancy from occurring. Unintended pregnancies may be prevented by the use of contraceptives. The use of contraceptives has increased over the past decade, though abortion rates have also not fallen due to failure of using these contraceptives. Many studies have been done showing the correlation between abortion rates and use of contraceptives (Clealand, 2020). Though there are many ethical and religious reasons as to why abortion is unacceptable, it is extremely difficult to ignore the great points made by the pro-choice side of the argument. Looking at different countries as models throughout the world may help lead to a comprisable solution, which may lead to the reduction of abortions. A comprehensive federal policy that may take into account all issues surrounding the circumstances of abortion may lead to the reduction of pregnancies being terminated.

Abortion is termed unethical and immoral by those who argue the pro-life side of abortion. A main point by the pro-abortion argument is that the fetus is not a person yet. According to the pro-life side, even if the fetus is not a person, it is still unethical. If drinking alcohol and consuming other toxins throughout a pregnancy resulting in fetal alcohol syndrome is unethical, then impairing a fetus to the point of death is even more unethical. Killing a fetus impairs the fetus much more than impairing the fetus with alcohol, thus is one is wrong morally and ethically, then so is the other. These two situations correlate very well and provide a concrete argument ethically for the pro-life side of abortion (Hedricks, 2018). Pro-life debaters often argue that if killing an adult is considered wrong, then in most cases, abortion is also considered wrong. If one were to kill an adult who has already lived part of their lives, they are only being deprived of a certain number of years left. For example, if an adult is 38 years old and murdered, imagine that they were deprived of another 30 sum years to die around the age of 70. This would

be considered a heinous crime in our society as murder is unacceptable in virtually all possible cases. If that adult who was 38 was aborted as a fetus, the individual is now being deprived of around 70 years total. In the eyes of the pro-life debaters, this crime seems to be more heinous once thought about in depth. How is it acceptable to kill an adult shaving part of their life off, though not allow a fetus to experience any of life by killing it before it gets the chance. It is human intuition that we accept the deaths of individuals who are older and lived longer as opposed to those who are younger and have not experienced life as much. If there are reasons in which the 38-year-old individual described above should be killed, then for those reasons the fetus should be killed. These two situations correlate to demonstrate that abortion is immoral and unethical. Another piece to this argument is that adult was once a fetus and therefore was still a person. Being a person is an essential property of every living being and if this was removed from the person, their existence would therefore be terminated. Analyzing this intuition further explains that a fetus is still a person and therefore killing a fetus holds the same power as killing a person which is ethically and morally wrong. If a fetus was considered to not be a person and not hold the essential properties of a living being, then the existence of the fetus would be terminated. This cannot make sense that the fetus was alive but did not exist. Deontology is also used to analyze the argument that it is wrong to kill a normal or innocent person for the benefit of others. It does not matter the magnitude of these benefits as it is still considered wrong. Lastly, the veil of ignorance regarding justice also analyzes this argument as to whether or not killing a fetus is moral or ethical. Interestingly enough racism in society has been used as a comparison to the killing of adults under the veil of ignorance. Individuals in a society prohibit racism as one has no knowledge if they are the victim or inflictor of racism, and one likely does not want to take the chance of being the victim. This example was used to demonstrate the case of murdering

an adult. As an individual would prohibit racism, an individual should also prohibit the killing of any adults following these same guidelines. Behind the veil of ignorance, it is difficult to draw the line and wonder whether the killing of fetuses is acceptable. An adult had once fulfilled the role of being a fetus and thus the veil of ignorance would take place the same way. Just as an adult did not want to run the risk of being killed, one would not want to take the chance of being the fetus that is killed. Overall, justice is also used within this argument to further explain that the killing of adults is the same as the killing of fetuses, unethical and immoral (Pruss, 2011).

Religion tends to be one of the main arguments that backs the anti-abortion, pro-life individuals. The Catholic church regularly notices abortion as the “act of killing an unborn child” in many countries (Szelewa, 2016). Ireland is infamously known as being a place where abortion is completely restricted. Ireland has even gone as far to deny the right of a rape victim to travel abroad in order to receive an abortion (Fletcher, 2002). Religion is a very difficult subject in America due to the separation of the Church and the State. Other places in the world like Poland seem to have tied the Catholic Church into their policies for the country. This is evident through their abortion laws demonstrating a victory of the Catholic Church over the law (Szelewa, 2016). Many Catholic believers and Churches have the right to this opinion and thought on abortion due to religious liberty in the United States. The right to religious liberty within America makes it difficult to draw the line on either side. No religion is able to define whether abortions should be legalized or not. On the contrary, no laws can tell believers of faith that they must accept or refuse abortion. This is what allows Catholic hospitals to have the right not to practice abortions within the United States. Though religion is one of the main arguments within abortion, it is definitely one of the most controversial and tricky topics to consider.

Contraceptives are widely known and available throughout the United States and are preventative measures for unintended pregnancies. The contraceptive methods should help to eliminate the need for abortion in many cases since one of the main causes that abortion occurs is due to unintended or unwanted pregnancies. Throughout the world, it has been found that non-use of contraceptives is the direct cause or reason for women to abort their pregnancy. The main reasons for non-use of contraceptives differ though a major concern is the side effects and health concerns (Cleland, 2020). A study to measure the relationships between contraception and abortion was conducted throughout several different countries. Abortion rates and contraceptive rates were observed along with whether or not fertility was constant or changing during the period of observation. It was concluded that when fertility rates were constant and stable, as contraceptive use rose, abortion rates fell (Marston and Cleland, 2003). Many contraceptives are available for purchase in the United States though for those who struggle financially, the Affordable Care Act is in place in order to provide aid. For example, most insurance plans should cover the most of or all of the cost of birth control for woman under the affordable care act (Planned Parenthood, 2021). Since contraceptive measures seem to be widely available especially within the United States, those engaging in sexual behaviors should be held responsible to practice all means of avoiding an unintended pregnancy. If contraceptive measures are used, abortion would not be necessary as unintended pregnancies are very unlikely to occur.

Many women view abortion as a failure on a “failing report card” (Foster, 2017). Women should be supported in these vulnerable times and not feel as though abortion is their only way out. Early feminists were extremely against abortion as they held worth on the lives of all humans. In papers written by early feminists, abortion was often known as “child murder.” Women who fell into abortion usually were not provided with support such as financial

resources, emotional support, and lacking much autonomy. Feminists referred to abortion as a “disgusting and degrading crime,” and therefore would try to avoid it at all costs. Women who proceeded to terminate their pregnancies were left feeling as though they had no other choice due to the lack of support throughout several areas of their lives (Foster, 2017). Women who do not wish to have an abortion should be provided with the upmost amount of support throughout their pregnancy so they may feel as though they are able to bring their child to term. Women who look at abortion as a failing report card seem to feel as though abortion may solve nothing. Following the conclusion of the Roe vs. Wade case, more than a million abortions a year are performed in America leaving everyone to wonder what those children could have done for the world (Foster, 2017). Is it ethical and moral that these women are driven to abortion and forced to kill their child who could have contributed many great things to the country and world? These women should not have to feel like this and should be provided with many means other than abortion when feeling as though they are indecisive with their capabilities of pregnancy.

The pro-choice side of abortion tends to lead towards arguments that are not surrounding religion though one interesting piece that counteracts the pro-life religious belief is known as the pro-life paradox. This pro-life paradox explains that children at the time of abortion are way too young to be responsible for their spiritual well-being and therefore will go straight to heaven as they did not do anything to deserve a sentence to hell. It looks at abortion as a way of saving many unborn souls from even experiencing the temptation of the world and allowing them to enjoy a peaceful voyage straight to heaven (Thomas, 2016). Though this paradox may try to counteract the religious beliefs of the pro-life argument for abortion, it poses as very problematic. This paradox can be taken in a multitude of ways, not just regarding abortion. If abortion is viewed as a means of saving the unborn from the temptation of the world, then

children who die young due to disease should be viewed at as the same way. This is untrue, unethical and immoral and therefore brings up an issue with using the pro-life paradox as an argument for abortion. This is another reason why using religion to debate a controversial topic can present itself as very problematic.

Though abortion is termed to be unethical and immoral for those who argue the pro-life side, the pro-choice side sees things completely different. Regarding religion, the bible never strictly states anything regarding the practice of abortion. Those who believe in the Catholic religion tend to follow he said, she said within the church. This poses a problem as who gets to decide that abortion is immoral and unethical? How is it that one can use religion as an excuse to want abortion abolished when there is no specific teaching within their main source of writing known as the Bible? This is another way proving that religion tends to be risky when attempting to use it as an argument for something so controversial.

Abortions coincide with the well-being of infant and child following birth. Pro-choice debaters tend to argue that those who are against abortion tend to care about the fetus until childbirth and following that, the care dissipates. The well-being of the infant and children following childbirth seems to be disregarded by the pro-life supporters. A study was done in order to test this theory looking at the well-being of infants and children within different states of America that have abortion laws with the most restrictions. Following the Roe vs. Wade case in 1973, women were granted the right to make the decision to end their pregnancy through abortion if this was their personal desire. A woman's decision on terminating the pregnancy was held in a higher regard than the right of a fetus to life. What did not fall into this supreme court case is allowing women to have completely restriction-free access to abortions throughout the country. Different states were given the ability to restrict women on their access to obtaining

abortions. Making it more difficult for a woman to obtain an abortion reduces the demand for abortions while still maintaining the rate of unintended pregnancies. There is a variety of restrictions throughout different states in America. Post viability ban is one example of a restriction in which the fetus at this point is thought to have the ability to survive outside of the womb with technology as a support mechanism. Usually, rape victims or those mothers who are endangered by their pregnancies have the choice to be exempt from this ban. Some states do require that the spouse be notified or consent upon the desire for abortion. Insurance restrictions may vary as some may require an additional premium to be paid and other companies may prohibit abortion in their plans. Counseling bans include health care providers from providing guidance for a woman to obtain an abortion. Partial-birth abortion ban forbids late-term abortion. Second trimester hospitalization involve abortions during the second trimester requiring taking place within a hospital meaning higher expenses for the patient. The twelve-week abortion ban involves prohibiting abortions past twelve weeks unless the woman's health is endangered. Medicaid funding restrictions vary state by state as the federal government is not mandated to fund Medicaid abortions within the different states. Many states place restrictions and ban public funding for abortions. Two-visit laws require women to participate in two separate visits for their abortion with window of twenty-four hours between, which can increase costs and time for the patients. Targeted regulation of abortion providers laws aims to push abortion businesses to fail and make abortions extremely difficult and expensive to obtain. Lastly parental involvement laws include that minors under the age of eighteen must have parental consent or provide parental notification prior to their abortion procedure. These are just a few of the common restrictions that vary all throughout the United States that make abortions for women difficult to obtain. These different restrictions were the ones observed throughout the study to measure

restrictions on abortions compared to well-being of children in specific states. The indicators of well-being include family, economic, and educational status being analyzed. It was concluded that states with the most restrictive abortion laws have significantly lower indicators of infant and child well-being (Medoff, 2016). This provides evidence to the claim made by the pro-choice side that those who support pro-life care about the fetus up until childbirth and then the care is halted.

The feminist theory within sociology argues that women should have the right to do what they please with their own bodies. This is a common theme seen within the arguments for the pro-choice side of abortion. The Guttmacher Institute ran research on abortions in Planned Parenthood and found that sometimes abortion is necessary for women due to poverty, race, still in school, etc. 75% of women having abortions are part of the poor and working poor, 66% are attempting post-secondary degrees, 61% are women of color, 59% are mothers including some who had past children in high school and college, and lastly half of all abortions are recurrent abortions (Foster, 2017). These statistics are shocking though abortion for an unintended pregnancy may be necessary to some women. Certain factors of life are out of the control of the woman and if she feels as though terminating her pregnancy will lead to her benefit, the feminist theory suggest that she should do whatever she desires. No individual other than the woman holding the child should be able to weigh in on her decision to obtain an abortion especially when there may be underlying factors such as those listed above.

Socioeconomic status tends to be a major factor when a woman is considering the option of an abortion. A study was done to view the correlation between welfare participants and abortion rates. Women who receive welfare in pro-life states were found to be more likely to consider and follow through with abortion as an option. On the contrary, women who receive

welfare are much less likely to obtain an abortion compared to low-income pregnant women in states where abortion policies coincide with the pro-life side. It has been found that women who maintain a low-income tend to experience lack of support, structural, and economic barriers when seeking availability of abortions. This has also been the case in women of color, immigrants, and members of vulnerable populations (Ostrach and Cheyney, 2014). This poses an issue as it has been found that women within the lower socioeconomic status along with women of color tend to have increased rates of abortion within the United States when compared to white women. Unintended pregnancy rates were measured, and it was found that Blacks, Hispanics, and women with a lower socioeconomic status were among the highest rates (Dehlendorf et. al, 2013). As mentioned above, unintended pregnancy is the main cause of abortion for women. Therefore, women with a lower socioeconomic status, Black women, and Hispanic women are going to make up the majority of those women who are seeking abortion due to an unintended pregnancy. It was also concluded that abortion availability is more restricted when it comes to those different groups of women which poses a major problem within society.

Italy is one of a few countries in which abortion is legal under certain terms and seems to provide a fair compromise to the women involved. Law 194 is known as the permission for a woman to interrupt her pregnancy within the first 90 days if this will be beneficial to her physical or mental health. Following the 90 days, abortion is permitted only when the pregnancy continuing poses a direct danger to the mother or the fetus. When a woman would like to obtain a pregnancy in Italy, they must provide their physician with the reason that they wish to terminate their pregnancy. If this reason is deemed urgent, the pregnancy is allowed to be terminated immediately with the use of a doctor's note. If the reason is deemed to be not urgent,

the doctor orders the patient to think for seven more days prior to obtaining a certificate for an abortion to be performed. When the patient is under 18 years of age, parental authority or approval of a judge is required. Abortion services are funded publicly and may be performed in several different places in which are also publicly funded. One issue within the abortion policies of Italy is conscientious objection. It is easy to become a conscientious objector which poses an issue with some women seeking abortions for different reasons. Law 194 does have in place that conscientious objection may not take place when the life of the woman is at danger due to the pregnancy (Caruso, 2020). Italy seems to have one law which states the expectations of abortion throughout the country and therefore may lessen the debate between the pro-choice and pro-life supporters.

Italy has one law in place that seems to clear a lot of the controversy with abortion while the United States still seems to stumble upon new issues every day. The Roe vs. Wade supreme court case was the big hallmark which allowed abortion to be legalized, though it did not explicitly provide laws and regulations for different states in the country. This creates issues especially with those women who are of lower socioeconomic status or are part of a minority group. Law 194 gives a clear deadline for acceptable abortions which may seem as a reasonable compromise as women are still able to obtain abortions, just not after a certain point unless a medical emergency were to arise. Having a deadline federally in the United States may lessen the controversy and increase compromise throughout the abortion debate between those who are pro-life and those who are pro-choice. If the controversy is lessened and a compromise is reached, the number of abortions within the United States may be reduced. Lastly, United States has the liberty of religion and therefore nobody's religion is the law. This means that religion should not be used as an argument either for or against abortion.

Abortion is a highly debated topic all around the world regarding the ethical and theological boundaries. A pro-life argument in support of ending abortion and having the unborn child be brought to term regardless is one side of the debate. Religious background tends to be a main reason behind many supporters of pro-life, though religion may pose many problems due to the complexity especially within the United States. Many supporters of pro-life argue that the life of the fetus is just as important as the life of an adult, as the fetus is considered a person. Contraceptives also provide a way for unintended pregnancies to be avoided and therefore for abortions to be reduced. A pro-choice argument in support of continuing abortion and allowing the women to make decisions for themselves and their pregnancies is the other side of the debate. Many economic ties correlate to abortion with abortion being less readily available to certain groups of women. The well-being of children seems to play a major role in the pro-choice side as it seemed to be significantly less in states with restrictive abortion laws. If abortion was abolished, this care of the child cannot be halted upon birth. The feminist theory also presented that women should do what they desire with their bodies as it is their right. Though there are many ethical and religious reasons as to why abortion is unacceptable, it is extremely difficult to ignore the great points made by the pro-choice side of the argument.

## References

- Caruso, Elena. "Abortion in Italy: Forty Years On." *Feminist Legal Studies* 28.1 (2020): 87-96. Print.
- Cleland, John. "The Complex Relationship between Contraception and Abortion." *Best Practice & Research Clinical Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, vol. 62, Jan. 2020, pp. 90–100. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1016/j.bpobgyn.2019.04.007.
- Dehlendorf, Christine, Lisa H. Harris, and Tracy A. Weitz. "Disparities in Abortion Rates: A Public Health Approach." *American Journal of Public Health* 103.10 (2013): 1772-779. Print.
- Fletcher, Ruth. "Post-colonial Fragments: Representations of Abortion in Irish Law and Politics." *Journal of Law and Society* 28.4 (2002): 568-79. Print.
- Foster, Serrin M. "The Feminist Case Against Abortion." *The Human Life Review*, vol. 43, no. 4, Fall 2017, pp. 19–26. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=reh&AN=ATLAn4291577&site=eds-live&scope=site.
- Hendricks, Perry. "Even If the Fetus Is Not a Person, Abortion Is Immoral: The Impairment Argument." *Bioethics* 33.2 (2018): 245-53. Print
- Hussey, Laura S. "Is Welfare Pro-Life? Assistance Programs, Abortion, and the Moderating Role of States." *Social Service Review*, vol. 85, no. 1, Mar. 2011, pp. 75–107. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1086/659227.

- Marston, Cicely, and John Cleland. "Relationships between Contraception and Abortion: A Review of the Evidence." *International Family Planning Perspectives* 29.1 (2003): 6. Print.
- Medoff, Marshall. "Pro-Choice Versus Pro-Life: The Relationship Between State Abortion Policy and Child Well-Being in the United States." *Health Care for Women International*, vol. 37, no. 2, Feb. 2016, pp. 158–69. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi 10.1080/07399332.2013.841699
- Ostrach, Bayla, and Melissa Cheyney. "Navigating Social and Institutional Obstacles." *Qualitative Health Research* 24.7 (2014): 1006-017. Print.
- Parenthood, Planned. "Where Can I Buy Birth Control Pills & How Much Do They Cost?" *Planned Parenthood*. Web. 23 Mar. 2021.
- Pruss, Alexander R. "I Was Once a Fetus: That Is Why Abortion Is Wrong." *Philosophy and Medicine* (2011): 19-42. Print.
- Szelewa, Dorota. "Killing 'Unborn Children'? The Catholic Church and Abortion Law in Poland Since 1989." *Social & Legal Studies* 25.6 (2016): 741-64. Print.
- Thomas, Dan. "Better Never to Have Been Born: Christian Ethics, Anti-Abortion Politics, and the Pro-Life Paradox." *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 44, no. 3, Sept. 2016, pp. 518–42. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1111/jore.12152.
- "Unintended Pregnancy and Abortion Worldwide." Guttmacher Institute, 17 Sept. 2020. Web. 23 Mar. 2021.

