

June 30th, 2005

Dr. Christopher C. Ibeh
PSU/NSF – REU/RET Director
Department of Engineering Technology
Pittsburg State University
Pittsburg, Kansas 66762

RE: The Ethics of Abortion

Dear Dr. Ibeh:

I am glad to inform you that the paper for the above project has been completed.

This paper will allow you to see the ethical issues that abortion faces. This paper will give you an introduction to the history of abortion in the US, as well as some of the different arguments in favor of abortion, also some arguments against abortion. This will start to give you an idea of what ethics has to do with abortion.

Sincerely,

Zac Tyler

Pc: Student, Plastics Engineering Technology, Pittsburg State University

The Ethics of Abortion

Prepared By:

Zac Tyler
Department of Engineering (Plastics) Technology
Pittsburg State University
Pittsburg, Kansas 66762

Submitted To:

Dr. Christopher C. Ibeh
PSU/NSF – REU/RET Director
Department of Engineering (Plastics) Technology
Pittsburg State University
Pittsburg, Kansas 66762

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Summary:

This research report will discuss the different ethical issues having to do with abortion, as well as the different sides to the issue and finally the effects mothers after they have had an abortion. This report will focus on the moral aspects to the ethical situation. This will initial many good points to what is ethical and unethical when dealing with abortion. Consciousness is a very good topic within the moral framework of this paper. This issue will define what is ethical and unethical when dealing with this issue.

Introduction:

Abortion and abortion laws started to begin to appear in the 1820's, in which the government implemented the law forbidding abortion after the 4th month of pregnancy. This was the first laws dealing with the abortion topic within the US. Through the efforts of physicians, the American Medical Association, and legislators, most of the abortions in the early to mid 1900's had outlawed abortion all together. However, illegal abortions were still very frequent, but they became less frequent during the Comstock Law which pretty much banned birth control information and devices. During this time feminists were very vocal on their distain for abortion, they opposed abortion which at the time was an unsafe medical procedure for women, endangering their health and life. The feminists only cared for the equality and freedom would end the need for abortion. They also believed that prevention was more important than punishment by the laws, and blamed circumstances, laws and the men they believed made abortion desirable. Yet feminists still supported and defended birth control, when it became available, as another way to prevent abortions. By the time the 1965 rolled around abortion had been banned in all 50 states, with some exceptions which varied different from state to state. These cases were such instances in which abortion was necessary to save the life of the mother, in cases of rape or incest, or if the fetus was deformed.

In 1973, the Supreme Court in the case of Roe v. Wade they declared that most existing state abortion laws were unconstitutional. This decision made it legal to have an abortion as long as the procedure was carried out within the 1st trimester; they also put limits on what restrictions could be passed on abortions in later stages of pregnancy. This ruling had many mixed feelings, for instance the Roman Catholic Church and other religious organizations opposed the change in laws.

This debate is still very touchy and often times explosive. For instance on Christmas day in 1984, three abortion clinics were bombed and those convicted called the bombings "a birthday gift for Jesus." The latest major conflict over abortion laws has been over termination of late pregnancies, termed "partial birth Abortions" by these who oppose them. Pro-choice supporters still believe that abortions such as these are to save the life or health of the mother or terminate pregnancies where the fetus cannot survive birth or cannot survive much after birth. Pro-life supporters believe that the fetuses may be saved and that many of these abortions are done in cases that aren't hopeless.

As you can see this topic is a very touchy topic and remains to be a common topic of debate when considering the ethical stand point. As far as moral ethics are concerned this would be a very wrong decision to even contemplate abortion. As utilitarianism

states, all actions should be directed toward achieving the greatest happiness or amount of good for the greatest number of people. The debate is who is benefiting from each stand point. Pro-life advocates may say that it is achieving the greatest good for the unborn child so that the child has a chance to live. The other side is the Pro-choice advocates that may state abortion is for the greatest good of the mother, considering the circumstance the mother is good. In this paper I will discuss the different sides of the story and after all that has been presented I will make an opinion of what I think is ethically moral or not.

Literature Review:

<http://womenshistory.about.com/library/weekly/aa012200.htm>

Before the abortion issue is addressed, abortion must be defined. Abortion is the destruction of the fetus or unborn child while the child is still in the mother's womb. There are a variety of ways this can be carried out and can be done by almost anyone from the mother herself to back alley abortions and even to abortions by clinics set up especially for this purpose. There are two sides to this controversial topic the Pro-life which are the people that oppose abortion altogether and the Pro-choice which are the people who believe it is the mother's right to choose if she wants to have an abortion. These two groups have two basic solutions to abortion. The pro-life solution is to have the child and just live with it, to them abortion is not an answer. The pro-choice solution is abortion because of reasons the mother feels appropriate.

According to this article abortion is morally and ethically wrong, but should it be legal for victims of rape or incest who have no other choice?

There is no real answer to this controversy, there are 2 sides, first is the pro-life group. This group does not believe in the abortion issue. Pro-life believes that rape and incest are very emotional topics. People just don't know how to handle that much pain, so there isn't a quick fix to the problem. That's why it is difficult for even pro-life people to come to think about the argument over abortion in cases of rape and incest. Sometimes people that believe abortion is wrong will allow abortion in this type of case because they don't know what else to do for the victim and treat it as a rare instance. But studies show that it does not help the victim, instead it only worsens the problem because the victim's feelings aren't helped. Many of the women that have abortions in this situation don't just have the abortion and forget about it, there is an aftermath described by many women that they feel empty and alone and fall into depression.

This is certainly a flaw to the Pro-life opinion, this is a very hard situation to deal with let alone have to decide whether or not to have an abortion. However this certain instance does not happen in all situations. For instance in 1987 a survey of 1,900 women at 30 abortion facilities were asked, why do women choose to have abortions? The women could give as many reasons as they wanted, and most of the women responded with one or more of these top six reasons:

1. Concerned about how having a baby could change her life, 92%
2. Not mature enough or too young to have a child, 81%
3. Can't afford baby now, 73%
4. Doesn't want others to know she had sex or is pregnant, 42%
5. Doesn't want to be a single parent, 37%

6. Unready for responsibility, 33%

The reason for which the public is going along with abortions is not always the reason of the person who wants to have an abortion. Women do not always have abortions because of rape, incest, deformed fetuses, or because their physical life is in danger. But these are the best reasons accepted by the public. There are other instances out there such as being poor, too young, unmarried, and not wanting a baby are some of the unpopular reasons for abortion.

<http://www.punkerslut.com/articles/ethicsofabortion.html>

In this article by Punkerslut the author examines many different questions and scenarios for why people are pro-choice or pro-life. This particular author is a pro-choice advocate and makes some very good arguments supporting his stance on the abortion issue. In this article he addresses three ethical questions concerning abortion. The first being where it is neither immoral or moral to have an abortion, the next being where it is immoral to have an abortion and the last being where it is moral to have an abortion. The author's stance on abortion is as he calls it "an expansion of ethical theory." The author describes this topic to be a question of applied ethics, similar to the moral dilemmas having to deal with questions about war, feminism, racism, and animal rights.

This author stresses the value of a conscious being in his article. The article states that there should be a foundation of how to determine right and wrong in order to answer the question of abortion. The value of a conscious being, according to the author, is the real ethical question. The author brings to the point that is abortion really wrong if the fetus is unconscious and incapable of feeling or having any desires. The author believes that understanding suffering (abortion) and conscious beings is the greatest step a person can take in their own moral development. There is some back ground information to make this point more clear. The part of the brain that is associated with sensations of pain and consciousness is the cerebral cortex. Until 18 weeks of gestation, the cerebral cortex is not developed enough for synaptic connections to take place within it. So this means that the signals that give the feeling of pain in an adult are not being received. Between 18 and 25 weeks, the brain of the fetus reached a stage at which there is some nerve transmission in those parts associated with consciousness. Finally, the fetus 'wakes up' at the gestational age of around 30 weeks. ("When is the Capacity for Sentience Acquired during Human Fetal Development Journal" of Maternal-Fetal Medicine, vol. 1) Thus the author makes the statement that abortion is acceptable when the fetus is in an unconscious state he made the comparison between a fetus and a rock. Both are incapable of feeling anything in the first 25 weeks of pregnancy so how can they have desires and wants. This is a very good point, if the fetus is not yet developed enough to feel pain or want to live then how can it be immoral to destroy something that isn't a conscious being.

The next argument is when it is moral or immoral. The statement is that "if a mother knows that her unborn baby is going to be born into a world of poverty and crime, where no night street is safe to walk, where work consists of repetitive, hazardous condition, where there is no star of hope in the sky of life and no reason besides affection to live. If a woman understands that she is afflicted with a disease that will deprive her child a mother, and if a mother knows that breeding children so that they may be fodder for cruelty and brutality without a single defender" then it is a moral decision.

However, abortion is illegal when the unborn infant is conscious being. This is the same as why it is immoral to take the life of a conscious being, for instance, an adult. The author believes that it is immoral to kill a conscious, unborn infant because it violates the principal of valuing a conscious being. A conscious being is still capable of emotions and desires, for example, the desire to live and feel pain. The author has the stance that sometimes abortion is moral and sometimes it is immoral. Punkerslut also makes the comparison of an unborn baby to a leech, they both live off the host animal. In the case of the baby it is living off the mother. This is a very relevant point; the fetus does nothing to support it or the carrier.

<http://www.abortionfacts.com/effects/effects.asp>

Abortion has been proven to cause premature birth. This happens because of cervical incompetence. This happens by too-early and forceful dilatation (stretching open) of the cervix where the baby comes out. During an abortion procedure, the cervical muscle is stretched open to allow the surgeon to enter the uterus; the cervix is usually soft and often open. Damage usually doesn't occur but, when a normal and baby are scraped out of a closed uterus protected by the donut shaped cervix muscle can be torn. If enough muscle fibers are torn, the cervix is permanently weakened, the most damage being done if this is the mother's first pregnancy. When "four fingers" is achieved or four fingers can slip through the cervix then the mother has reached the point in which the nurse says she is "complete" or point where slow dilation of the cervix occurs. When it is wide open ("complete") can the baby can travel through the birth canal. Before birth this "door" opens very slowly. In a miscarriage, all those cramps do the same If it is weak, or "incompetent," it may not stay closed and may result in premature opening and miscarriage, or premature birth. So premature births or miscarriage are a side effect to abortion. Minor complications to abortion include: minor infections, bleeding, fevers, chronic abdominal pain, gastro-intestinal disturbances, vomiting, and Rh sensitization. The nine most common or major complications are infection, excessive bleeding, embolism, ripping or perforation of the uterus, anesthesia complications, convulsions, hemorrhage, cervical injury, and endotoxic shock. Mothers who have gone through abortions also have many psychological side effects as well, from sexual dysfunctions, longing to become pregnant again in order to "make up" for the lost pregnancy, avoiding people, situations, or events in which she associates with her abortion, Self-reproach, depression, social regression, withdrawal, obsession with need to become pregnant again, and hasty marriages have all been associated with women and their abortions.

Moral or Immoral?

The authors cited have created some very good points having to do with the abortion issue. So one might ask when it is moral and when is it immoral? The author above has mentioned the consciousness factor. If a baby's cerebral cortex is not developed enough to want to live or desire life then the baby is more like a rock than a human at this point. So abortion will satisfy moral frameworks as grounds for a reasonable abortion. If a child inside the mother has not developed enough to create a being that is conscious enough to want the same things a human that is developed wants,

then this is a very good time to do an abortion before the being inside the mother is able to develop the want to live. Therefore the abortion issue is like killing a rock, something without wants or desires. Another good point is brought up comparing the womb to a leach feeding off of the mother. If you look at it this is a very good point to make considering that the mother is the primary beneficiary that it is in the picture, the baby is like a parasite living off of the mother. This is a very harsh way to look at things but it is very realistic. The mother has the right to decide what to do with a being that is neither conscious and is more like a parasite.

However there are instances where abortion is not moral, the decision to abort a child after the baby is conscious is a very immoral decision. This goes against all ethical morals as a human being. This is like killing a walking, talking, breathing, wanting, desiring human. If the being inside the mother desires to live and has the will to live then the abortion issue is an immoral one. Abortion is a touchy subject, there is very ethical issues having to deal with morality.

The basis of morality is a system of right and wrong conduct for a person. The basis of this term means that whatever is felt inside a person is wrong then it is morally wrong. Abortion is wrong, but there instances where it is an acceptable thing. Incest or rape being the most evident reason for making abortion a morally right subject. This is reasonable for a desperate person who has been hurt and violated all together.

Conclusion

This issue is neither moral nor immoral. There are reasons to argue both sides of the story. Neither pro-life nor pro-choice is the correct one, I have proven different instances where each side of the story will go against the fundamentals of their side of the story. Abortion is a very touchy subject with different instances that can't be ignored, because it's the instances in which decide whether the decision to have an abortion is immoral or moral. The consciousness factor is a very strong case for opposing the abortion issue as well as agreeing with it, let's not forgets about the rape or incest issue either. When dealing with this issue there is not definite set of rules for what is ethically moral or immoral 100% and there are many different circumstances that will define whether abortion is moral or immoral by itself.

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