

Abortion is an issue
only concerned with
rights and duties
essay sample



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Abortion is currently defined as “ an untimely delivery voluntarily occurred with an intent to destroy the foetus”. Abortion was at first made illegal in 1803 but cultural changes led to the passing of the Abortion Act in 1967 when abortion became legal up to 28 weeks of the pregnancy. This has since been changed to 24 weeks. At present various studies point to an annual abortion rate of between forty and fifty million, this increases every year. The meaning of abortion is quite clear from its definition. It is one of the most controversial ethical issues with arguments both for and against the subject from many different groups within the community.

Where rights and duties are concerned there are many different approaches from these groups as to what rights the mother has, the rights of the unborn child and the duties the mother has to herself, her partner, her religion and her unborn baby. However in my opinion abortion is not only concerned with rights and duties. There are other issues such as emotional factors surrounding the mother, different situations for each individual person and circumstances that must be taken into consideration when abortion is an issue. I will discuss the rights and duties involved and also the effect of emotional elements and how different situations and circumstances may influence decisions where abortion is concerned.

The Catholic Church has a pro-life view, “ Behold, children are a gift of the Lord” (Psm 127: 3). Abortion is considered to be the murder of a defenceless child who has the same rights as the mother thus the mother has a duty to the child to continue the pregnancy:

“ What could ever be a sufficient reason for excusing in any way the direct murder of the innocent? This is precisely what we are dealing with here. Whether inflicted upon the mother or upon the child, it is against the precept of God and the law of nature: ‘ Thou shalt not kill’. ” Pope Pius XI commenting on abortion in his encyclical on Christian Marriage, December 1930.

The Church teaches that life begins when the egg is fertilized and so the fertilized egg, embryo and foetus are considered by the Church to be full human beings. “ Endowed with ‘ a spiritual and immortal’ soul the human person is ‘ the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake. From his conception, he is destined for eternal beatitude’ ” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part Three, Section 1, Chapter 1). They therefore have an equal right to its life with its parents. Abortion is wrong regardless of any circumstances or situations that the mother may be in. The mother, if catholic, has a duty to God to keep her baby and also to respect life as life is sacred and the Church teaches that only God can take life away.

Pro-choice groups argue that the mother has a right and a duty to herself to make a choice whether to have a baby or have an abortion. The National Abortion campaign state that:

“ The right of women to control their own fertility is a fundamental human right...we think there will probably always be situations where the mother concerned should have the complete choice of either complete abortion, or keeping the baby.”

Pro-choice particularly emphasise the right to make a choice depending on circumstances or situations that may affect the mother emotionally or physically. As I have previously mentioned I do not feel that abortion is merely an issue concerned with rights and duties and there are situations that should be taken into consideration when abortion is called into question. In cases of rape it could be argued that abortion should be an option for the victim who would be emotionally scarred, but the Church would still see this as wrong. Similarly in circumstances when the mother is at risk physically or mentally the Catholic perspective still states that:

“ No matter how desirable it might seem at times to save the life of the mother, common sense teaches and all nations accept the maxim, that ‘ evil is never to be done that good may come of it’; or, which is the same thing, that ‘ a good end cannot justify a bad means’.” (The Tribunal of the Holy Office)

Therefore should a delivery go wrong and the attending physicians have the choice of either killing the foetus and saving the life of the woman or allowing nature to take its course, and watching both the foetus and the woman die, the only moral decision in the eyes of the Church is the latter. The Church of England said, “ the life of the foetus is not absolutely sacrosanct if it endangers the life of the mother” (1984), so if the woman’s life is in danger then abortion is acceptable. The question could be asked what if the woman was catholic, a widow and had four other children? This is an example of where abortion is not an issue only concerned with rights and duties but other factors should be taken into account such as emotional circumstances and an individual’ situation.

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Abortion is a controversial and complicated issue that I feel is concerned with rights and duties but not only rights and duties, there are many factors that need careful consideration. It is also clear that both arguments concerned with abortion, pro-life and pro-choice, are consistent and able to support their statements and thoughts with evidence that counter attacks the opposing views. I feel that people devoted to the Roman Catholic Church would certainly wish follow their duty to their religion in terms of abortion. However it would be hard if their emotional or mental health was suffering in terms of making a decision concerning abortion. It is obvious therefore that abortion is concerned with rights, duties and emotional, circumstantial and situation factors and every element needs to be addressed by each and every individual when considering abortion.