

Explain the views of the religion you have studied on the issue of abortion

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Many people have tried to break down and work out the answer to abortion and the controversy linked to it. No other ethical theory has caused such bitter disagreement among so many people. Each person, from each religion has his or her own view, and each religion, in itself is further divided.

Christianity is one such religion, being divided into numerous denominations. Catholicism views life to be much too sacred to destroy, basing their opinions on Jeremiah 1; 5, " before you were formed in the body of your mother, I (God) had knowledge of you." Each denomination of the Christian religion has its own view of abortion. The Church of England combines strong opposition to abortion with a recognition that there can be-strictly limited-conditions under which it may be morally preferable to any available alternative. Orthodox Christians believe in the unique creation of man in the image and likeness of God and that physical life is His sovereign gift.

The deliberate killing of the unborn, the sick, disabled or elderly is wrong and an abomination before Him. Quakers feel that ' God is in everyone' and therefore that would mean that God is in a foetus, depending on when a foetus becomes a person. Quakers like to think things through carefully, but realise that in some situations, abortion may be the only alternative. There are also other Quakers who are very keen to enable women to play a full role in society, leading them to feel, sometimes that abortion may be acceptable. The main question they consider is whether it is right or wrong to value the life of the unborn child over the life of the mother. Personal conscience in this issue is of the greatest importance for Quakers.

Catholics take a conservative view on this potentially divisive issue, holding that there is no dividing line in the process from conception to birth. They do, in fact believe that “ human life begins at conception” (‘ LIFE’- a pro-life Catholic charity) and that it should be protected. Aristotle agreed with this notion, discussing that “ one swallow does not make a summer” (Ethics Book II. 098a27). He points out that a person is made of diverse experiences collected over a period of time and there is no one moment when someone becomes a person.

The Pope himself also input his observations saying, “ that all human life- from the moment of conception and through all subsequent stages, is sacred.” (1979). ‘ Our Lady’ claimed, in 1975 that “ the soul is placed by the Eternal Father into the body of an unborn at the precise exact moment of conception.” This is a valuable part of Christianity and so is very significant to Catholics. There are, of course other views of when life begins, yet some of these have been proved wrong through technological advances in medical sciences.

The example of ‘ quickening’ demonstrates this. This argument insisted life began when the mother felt her baby move. Although this is a big physical and emotional step for the mother, science has proved the baby actually starts moving long before the mother actually feels it, mainly because the foetus had been too light beforehand. This argument contradicts that of the ‘ personhood’ argument, which states that in order to be protected as a human, one must be a classified ‘ person; ‘ consciousness, a sense of self,

rationality, sense of past, present and future and a want to continue living.' ('Dialogue' magazine. Brenda Almond, page 10.

) A 'potential' human being, being the foetus, or embryo is denied claim of being an 'actual' human being. Viability has also been seen as a point where life begins, but, once again due to medical advances, technology has improved thus being able to keep premature babies alive, increasingly earlier than 24 weeks. Birth, and the moment the baby breathes air has also been known to be the beginning of life and is actually the legal point at which the status of a person is confirmed. However, the birth is one of the least significant stages in a foetus' development or life. Christians base their ethics, primarily on the Bible.

The command to 'love one's neighbour as you love thyself' is very important and follows the universally known 'sanctity of life' argument. The 'sanctity of life' argument debates life, its meaning, and its worth. Christians believe that life is a gift from God, and that people are "created in the image of God" (Gen. 9: 6). This suggests that all people are made by the same creator, therefore having the same privileges and rights. It suggests all people possess the qualities which distinguish them from animals; morality, reason, creativity and self-worth.

In Psalm 8: 5, the Bible says "You (God) made him (man) a little lower than heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour," showing the sheer importance of each human, and their astounding value. Isaiah 49. 1 further emphasizes this point saying, "the Lord called me before my birth; from within the womb he called me by name." This shows how much God cares

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for each individual person, and Catholics interpret this care as a sign that God does not approve of abortion. Another part of Christian belief has its roots in the Bible verse Job 1: 21, " Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." God is the author of life and only he decides when it begins and ends.

This is further developed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church; " It is God who remains sovereign master of life. We are obliged to accept life gratefully and present it for his honour and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of," (Paragraph 2280.) Catholics feel life has a purpose and that God has an aim for all his ' sheep.

' Isaiah 64: 8 illustrates this by saying, " Yet, O Lord, you are the father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." The author of Psalm also made this point declaring " all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139: 13-16.) God had already planned the life and destiny of every human. Christians therefore feel life is too unique and special to destroy.

Intentionally killing someone would also be considered as a rejection of God's sovereignty, and therefore is deemed wrong. Abortion is, unquestionably the killing of something, and as already established, Catholics believe life begins at conception, so abortion would be, ultimately killing a human. This is going directly against the clear instruction of the sixth commandment described in Exodus 20; " Thou shalt not kill."

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Termination of the foetus is seen as a sin and, primarily as murder. The Quality of Life argument brought forward by Kuchse holds the view that if life is so miserable and depressing, then compassion should be shown, especially as Christians.

He also argues that quality of life includes aborting the lives of handicapped foetuses. Pregnant woman frequently undergo amniocentesis tests to show any foetal disabilities. If positive, in almost every case, abortion is recommended, as standard practice. Christians however, use Christ's life as an example to show that his teaching particularly singled out the weak, ill and marginalized. Compassion like Jesus showed means to 'suffer with.

'Caring' for the handicapped is not a question of preference but one which accepts life, in whatever form, as part of the human condition." (Issues of Life and Death, Wilcockson, page 45.) Catholics have a very straightforward and outlined approach to the controversial topic of abortion. It bases its views and ideology on the Bible as well as the 'Humanae Vitae' written by the Pope, the head of the Roman Catholic Church. Mother Theresa once said, "If abortion is not wrong, nothing is wrong." They see life as valuable and a gift from God, beginning at the clear-cut moment of conception.

Terminating a pregnancy would go against the teaching of God as he clearly writes that killing is wrong. Catholics do, very rarely however, realise some situations where aborting a baby is the only available option, for example, 'double effect' or in the case of an ectopic pregnancy. They believe, ultimately that God made life, controls life and is the only one who has any right to take away life. Qb (i) Outline how Bentham's principle of utility could

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be used to defend abortion. Jeremy Bentham was the first philosopher to fully articulate the ethical theory known as utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism has been described to fore mostly seek ' the greatest happiness for the greatest number.' Bentham had been a critic of established political doctrines and was much concerned with social welfare, such as prison reform, religion, poor relief, international law and animal welfare. He therefore sought to devise a theory to benefit society. In Bentham's version of Utilitarianism, everything was deemed good or bad depending on the action, which produces the greatest pleasure and least sum of pain. Anything that produces advantage, pleasure, good or happiness and prevents mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness was considered right. In terms of abortion, killing the foetus may, depending on the circumstances cause happiness, or sadness.

For example, if the mother-to-be were a fifteen-year-old girl, she would have to stop her studies, at least for the pregnancy, if not afterwards as well, to look after her baby. Family members may be disappointed at her behaviour and could feel ashamed. Some may even go to extremes and disown her. Her friends may lose contact with her as she cannot go out or meet them at school. The father, whether he was a long-term boyfriend or not may decide not to take responsibility for anything, leaving everything up to the mother. Some members of society will also, presumably look down on her.

In this case, aborting the baby will cause the greatest happiness as the evidence will have been destroyed and can be put behind everyone. On the other hand, people will always remember, and simply killing off a human is

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not as easy for some, so it could harm the girl, mentally, emotionally, and even physically. Bentham's quantitative pleasure exemplifies that he sees all pleasure as being equal. This also demonstrates that he is concerned with quantities and majorities. In the case where a man buys ten beers for his nine friends, Bentham would give all ten men one beer each.

Later Utilitarians (i. e. J S Mill) would give all ten beers to one man, focusing pleasure and happiness on quality. In terms of quantitative pleasure, the decision to have the baby inside the womb already will depend on how many people would become happy by the decision. Bentham developed the 'hedonic calculus' as a means of scientifically defining and measuring pleasure.

His seven-point criteria included 'intensity; duration; certainty; extent; remoteness; richness and purity.' Benthamite decision-making required a person to go through each of these aspects with every decision they come across. Using the hedonic calculus when deciding whether to terminate or not, would require each of the seven-points to be thought through.

Bentham's principle of Utility judges the rightness and wrongness of actions on the outcome of them, and the person's assessment of the consequences. The intention, however commendable it may be is not important if the action is condemned. Therefore, even if one wanted to do the right thing, according to universally held principles, like 'do not murder', causing the individual or the majority of the society pain and distress, would deem the action wrong.

This then, requires each person to lay aside his or her actions or religious beliefs and start afresh using 'act utilitarianism' as a guide. Utilitarianism

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would advise the pregnant person to consider every person which may be affected by the birth of the baby, including family members, friends, society as a whole, as well as themselves, the 'other half' and, of course the baby itself. The hedonic calculus could be used, to decide what would make the majority happy. The maximum pleasure, and therefore 'quantitative' pleasure would result in the birth being right. Well-known, moral principles reflected from religions such as Christianity, or values replicated by being a law-abiding citizen should be laid aside and the purely socially beneficial theory should be followed.

If more people are saddened at the birth of the baby, for example in the case of rape, where a resultant pregnancy would not be a joyful occasion, to terminate the baby would not be wrong. It would cause less distress and suffering to more people, therefore making it right to kill the foetus.

Consequentialism could also be used to defend abortion, as Bentham feels judgements about whether a decision had been right or wrong can only be judged after the action. Therefore, if a baby had been aborted, and it caused much more sadness than it did happiness, it had been wrong. Yet, Act Utilitarianism is about actions, and no one can know the consequences of anything.

Qb (ii) Assess this attempt to defend abortion. Judith Jarvis Thomson has become well known for her feminist attitudes, especially towards abortion. Her essay 'a Defence of Abortion' argues for abortion, in terms of, mainly the mother's rights. Thomson uses many bizarre examples of pregnancy and how she feels about it. The violinist illustration describes how, suddenly,

unasked or permitted something simply joins to her, and she must give up her life to simply lie down for nine months.

She goes on to describe the choices the woman now has-to stay and allow the usage of her body, out of charity or to pull out the machine and leave, thus causing the violinist to die. This story parallels with pregnancy. The foetus simply plants itself in the woman's womb, having not asked permission. It causes the woman to give up certain aspects of her life, although not as severely as described in this instance, where the woman can only lie down. The woman has a choice, whether to keep the foetus, as an act of charity, or to terminate it.

The woman, described has been abducted and forced to help this man. She was caught completely offguard. If a woman became pregnant, however, she would have to have had sexual intercourse, knowing there is always a chance of fertilizing an egg. Becoming pregnant may have been an accident or it ' wasn't meant to happen' each person still knows the chances. The shock, therefore of a woman becoming pregnant and a woman being plugged into a stranger, would be considerably less.

The woman and the violinist were not shown to have any personal connection, whether that be family, friend, colleague or even neighbour. She has not seen him before, nor spoken to him and maybe, however famous or talented he may be, had not heard of him. However, a baby is made by its parents. It will have half the genes of the mother, and will grow inside of her. It may resemble a parent, or another family member, physically or through similar characteristics.

The baby is the mother's flesh and blood and belongs to her. The connection is much greater than with the stranger, and to many people, of considerably more worth. Thomson uses the example of a rapidly growing boy, who in a few moments will crush the woman to death and will destroy her house. Bystanders do not, and cannot intervene. The woman has two choices; she could die, or she could kill the boy-to save herself. This overpowering feeling could be contrasted with the mental problems mothers-to-be may encounter during pregnancy, as well as physical likeness, as the foetus does grow.

Thomson also addresses the case where the mother would die if the baby were to live. Her solution is that the mother's rights exceed those of her foetus, and that it would be worth more to save the mother. Thomson goes on to point out that "the right to life consists not in the right not to be killed, but rather in the right not to be killed unjustly." Therefore if a woman voluntarily, has sexual intercourse, using no protection, to abort the baby would be killing unjustly, and would be depriving it of the life it has a right to. The 'people-seeds' that drift about in the air argument, I feel, shows the theatrical element reflected throughout the essay. Thomson imagines people seeds, which enter by windows and doors, and take root in upholstery and carpets.

If no children are wanted, fine mesh screens should be fixed and one should have no furniture, in order to rid the household of any risks of becoming impregnated. She is referring here, to a life without sexual intercourse, and that everyone who does not want children should have hysterectomies.

Thomson refers to real, live little people as being annoying, unwanted, 'bug-

like' objects, which rebel against any protection, and take root wherever they can, like pests. She is discussing that, if all possible precautions were used, to abort the foetus would not be unjust because it was clearly not wanted. Thomson ends the article pointing out that it is the mother's choice and, although she may 'ought' to keep her baby, having used precautions, or not, whatever she decides is her prerogative.

John T. Noonan was a Roman Catholic priest, which reflects in his thoughts throughout his essay, 'How to Argue about Abortion.' His first criticism is of Thomson's fantasy violinist argument, saying, "The similitude to pregnancy is grotesque." He goes on to describe a real-life case in America, where an old, sick man was thrown out of a house into the cold after having asked to extend his invitation through the night. Noonan uses this example to make the vital point that "The obligation arises when one person 'understands and appreciates' the condition of the other.

"The man had the privilege of staying, and his host had the duty to ensure he would come to no harm, or put him into an environment where he would become non-viable. Noonan is saying that the foetus has rights, which should not be ignored. Noonan realises exceptions where abortion may be seen to be acceptable. Abortion, in the case where the child is deformed by drugs, disease, or genetic defect, is seen to be putting the child out of misery. However, the "most seriously incapacitated prefer living to dying," according to research, so the feelings of the parents are treated with the most tenderness and consideration. The foetus' desires are ignored.

Existential philosophy, by Jean-Paul Sartre focuses on the factors, which make humans different from all other living things.

He highlights human rights and “ Freedom is the imperative to live an authentic human life” (Issues of Life and Death, Wilcockson. Page 7) Another kind of difficult case permitting abortion is rape. If forced to keep her baby, the mother would be compelled to go through nine months being reminded of the trauma. Rape arouses emotion, terror and anger but Noonan feels that, by using this argument, all unwanted and unplanned pregnancies could be justified. Pregnancies are rarely planned and, if ‘ accidents’ happen, or rape, using the argument; “ every unintended pregnancy may be interrupted if its continuation will cause emotional distress to the mother.

“ Ectopic pregnancies and some cases of a cancerous uterus may occur. Operations need to be performed in order to prevent the mother from dying. Noonan acknowledges this, and simply adds that the doctors should not characterize the abortion as ‘ indirect.’ The doctor knows to save the mother, the baby must be killed, or, in the case of an ectopic pregnancy removed. He “ necessarily intends to kill.” Noonan feels they should just be straight and not twist their words.

There is no alternative way of correcting the problem, so the doctrine of ‘ double effect’ occurs. Noonan, in summary feels abortion is not justifiable, except in the case of ‘ double effect.’ He attacks people who only see the parent’s rights and acknowledges the foetus has rights too. Noonan uses real examples of pointing out that people are not morally justified, by reference to one’s own property to expel a weak and helpless fellow human, especially

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since they had been invited and if it will bring certain death. Laura Purdy and Michael Tooley, in their article 'Is Abortion Murder?' deal with the morality of abortion. They feel society could be benefited by the legalisation of abortion.

Their first line of reasoning describes that, some people, who feel moral considerations should outweigh human happiness, and abortion to be prohibited, would be responsible for "untold human misery" giving many examples. They outline their view saying "an organism can have a right to life only if it now possesses, or possessed at some time in the past, the capacity to have a desire for continued existence." They feel that the foetus is not a person, and go on to portray a person as being self-conscious and recognizes itself as a person. They also feel that a person "cannot have a right to something unless he is at some time capable of having the corresponding desire." This is similar to Singer's 'preference utilitarianism', where direct reasons are given about why a person's life should be respected, in light of their preference to live or die. They also feel that a human foetus has no right to life, as it is not capable "of envisaging a future for itself, and of having desires about its own future states.

"Purdy and Tooley feel a foetus is not a person, only a potential person and so there should be no moral opposition to abortion. Differences in opinions towards abortion are clearly transmitted from all perspectives. People feel differently towards reasons why abortion should be performed, or legalised, as well as who should decide. They disagree about the parent's rights, the mother's rights, the doctor's rights and the foetus' rights. Opinions diverge concerning the foetus itself and when its life actually begins. Religion,

experience and moral obligations play parts in this topic, but in conclusion I feel it is up to the individual person to decide.