

Introduction the fetus.
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Introduction

Although abortion may be legally permissible in many countries, it is nevertheless a debatable issue regarding its moral permissibility.

Different ethical theories have been put forward to provide the moral guidance with regard to abortion most notably, the liberal and conservative perspectives. The difference that divides the two perspectives concerns the moral status of the fetus and the degree to which the fetus has right to life. However, both of the two perspectives do not regard the role played by the pregnant woman during gestation and the relationships involved during pregnancy between the woman and the fetus. The feminist perspective on the other hand, emphasizes that the woman has a pivotal role in abortion as the fetus occupies her body during the gestation period. All these perspectives base their arguments on values rather than facts and the fact that the beginning of human life is not clearly defined. However, the scientific perspective answers the question as to when life begins and provides meaningful insights, as at what point human life deserves protection just like any other human individual and for what reasons for protecting its rights.

The Conservative perspective on Abortion

The conservative perspective on abortion also called the pro-life perspective proposes that the human fetus is human with a unique set of genetic material (DNA) and therefore has full rights just like any other human being (Sumner 347). The conservatives believe the uniqueness of the DNA is what confers an embryo moral status.

The conservative perspective further states that abortion is homicide and as such not morally permissible. The conservatives believe that the fetus is of the same moral standing as the mother and thus both have equal rights. However, science holds that during the early stages of embryo development the zygote, with its unique set of DNA, can subdivide, and develop into two identical embryos.

This then begs the question as whether identical twins with much similar DNA have moral status. In addition, conservative proponents neglect the rights of the pregnant woman over her body but claim that the woman has no right to terminate the life of another human, based on her interests.

The Liberal Perspective on Abortion

The liberal perspective on abortion also called pro-choice view places the decision whether or not to terminate the pregnancy on the woman based on personal health and future. The liberals argue that while the fetus may be human, it lacks the qualities to grant it rights like other human beings (Noonan 98).

Liberal perspective thus does not consider the fetus worthy of any rights and protection making abortion morally permissible. The liberals place more emphasis on the rights of the woman instead of the fetus. They claim that it is the right of the woman to protect her health, happiness, freedom and therefore, to terminate a pregnancy is justifiable. They oppose the claim from a conservative perspective that fetus has rights by arguing that the fetus resemblance to a person or its potential of becoming a person in future does not warrant it any significant right to life. The liberal perspective,

however, does not provide a proper moral guidance to the woman faced with a decision of whether or not to procure an abortion.

It does not consider the moral conflict faced by the woman in making this decision, instead; it allows the woman to exercise autonomy over her body giving her the freedom of choice (Sherwin 96). The liberals' view that the fetus has no rights as the sole basis for the choice to abort or not, does not provide moral justification for abortion, because it neglects the relationships involved in the pregnancy by merely giving the liberty to terminate pregnancy.

Feminist perspective on Abortion

The feminist view on abortion acknowledges the deep relationship developed between the woman and the fetus during pregnancy. It further argues that the woman has moral responsibility over the fetus founded on the relationship developed during gestation (Sherwin 199). This accounts for the concerns that women have when faced with the decision whether to procure an abortion or not.

The feminist perspective considers other factors such as the women's feelings about the fetus, the relationship of the woman and her partner and her obligations in the family as a basis for making a decision to or not to terminate a pregnancy. Both the feminists and liberals hold the opinion that a woman has the right of choice during a pregnancy. However, they differ in the sense that the feminists focus on the woman while the liberals focus on the fetus. The liberals also do not consider the mother-fetus relationships during pregnancy. Sherwin contradicts the liberal perspective by arguing

that from a feminist point of view the fetus is morally significant but not absolutely (101). On the other hand, the liberal view disregards social factors that are also important during a pregnancy like personal health or the plans of the woman. Both the liberal and the conservative perspectives do not consider the relationship of the mother and the fetus nor the social factors involved.

Religious Perspective on Abortion

The religious views on abortion oscillate between extreme views where abortion is an act of murder to moderate views where abortion is a necessary act depending on the circumstances.

The religious perspective covers wide issues taking into account not only the rights of the fetus but also the status and rights of the mother. All the major religions provide moral guidance regarding abortion based on religious texts and human reasoning. Most religions consider abortion a sin and therefore, not morally permissible. However, some religions place more significance on the status and rights of the woman more than on the fetus and therefore, suggest that abortion is permissible under some circumstances.

Scientific Perspective

Science attempts to answer the question as to when human life begins, which is important in determining the moral permissibility of abortion.

The abortion debate is on moral values rather than on facts, (Keith and Tony 33). The scientific perspective provides clear evidence as to when human life begins in an attempt to end the abortion debate. According to a universally accepted scientific criteria, the sperm-egg fusion leads to the formation of a
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zygote approximately 24 hours after fertilization. The Zygote soon after its formation begins a sequence of events that facilitate further embryo development. This is uncharacteristic of either the sperm cell or the egg separately therefore making the zygote characteristic of a human organism. However, the point at which fertilization (sperm-egg fusion) ends and zygote becomes human otherwise known, as syngamy, is debatable. After the binding of the sperm and the egg during fertilization, the membranes of the two cells fuse forming a hybrid cell, the zygote that contains two different genetic materials.

In the zygote the DNA contributed by the sperm and the egg undergo modification to enable it to participate in further embryonic development. This is unique to the zygote making it different from the sperm or the egg. The events point to the evidence that the fusion process creates a new cell, a human cell (Keith and Tony 34). The question that remains unanswered is whether this human cell is an individual human organism and therefore deserves recognition. An organism possesses many complex organs that are interdependent to allow an organism to carry out the activities of life. A human cell in contrast, contains the genetic material but has no complex organization. Syngamy refers to the process that marks the onset of a new cell; the zygote, that to some extent is different from the sperm and egg.

However, it does not provide sufficient scientific evidence to show that the new cell so formed is a new human being and such accorded special rights and protection. This leaves the question as to when do human life begin and when is it appropriate to procure an abortion; a matter for the ethicists.

Conclusion

The issue of moral permissibility of abortion is controversial and consequently, arouses much debate. Different perspectives base their arguments on flawed views that cannot entirely justify abortion. The scientific perspective provides explanation as to when the fetus becomes human and therefore deserves rights as any human being. From the evidence adduced through scientific research, the ethicists and other concerned parties can make informed decisions regarding abortion without infringement on the rights of the mother or of the unborn child.

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