

ABORTION AND THE MORAL STATUS OF THE FOETUS

1. Moral status of the foetus

The moral status of the foetus refers to the rights the foetus has and various views and opinions can be found on this. An important concept in determining the moral status of the foetus is the ontological status the foetus has. The ontological status of the foetus refers to the theory as well as the nature of being and existence and also refers to the type of entity the foetus is. (Joubert & Rostoll, 2012:18-19)

2. Views on the moral status of the foetus

These views on the moral status of the foetus with regard to abortion include:

- a. Extreme conservative view: This view holds that the foetus is not an independent individual that can exist independently from the mother but that from the moment of conception it is a separate, unique individual human being with its own genetic code (Steinbock, 2011:43), and is therefore a human being just like any one of us walking and breathing and the only justifiable condition for taking the life of the unborn baby has to be the same that would justify the killing of an adult human being. (Joubert & Rostoll, 2012:19) Therefore this view holds that abortions are equal to murder and is unethical and morally unjustifiable as the moral status of the foetus is equal to that of an adult.
- b. Extreme liberal view: This view is held by abortionists who claim that the personhood of a human only starts between birth and the age of one month (<http://www.iep.utm.edu>). This viewpoint denies that any moral status can be ascribed to a foetus and therefore abortion is not seen as morally wrong or as equal to murdering an adult. It is rather viewed as the removal of organic material from the woman's body instead of killing and removing a human being. (Joubert & Rostoll, 2012:19) Therefore this view holds that abortion is acceptable and morally right as a foetus has no moral status until it's born.

- c. Moderates: According to followers of this point of view a morally relevant break in the biological process of development from the zygote to birth determines the justifiability of having an abortion as the moral status a foetus has is determined by the development of the foetus and a foetus is therefore not seen as a human being but rather as a human offspring with a different moral status (<http://www.iep.utm.edu>). The first assigning of moral status to the foetus would be at the point where the foetus attained ontological status (Joubert & Rostoll, 2012:19). Therefore this view says that before a foetus has reached ontological status an abortion is seen as morally justifiable and not as murder.

3. Implications for assigning moral status to a foetus

When we assign moral status to a foetus many moral implications linked to this emerges, these implications include questions such as:

1. Is the foetus rightfully rightful to be carried for the full term of the pregnancy?
2. What can be regarded, if there is any, as permitting circumstances to take a human life?
3. What other rights with more importance than the right of life exists?
4. How do we decide which life takes preference should the woman's life be in danger due to her pregnancy?
5. Is it morally right to disregard that the possibility exist that the foetus may be human?
6. Can we as humans ever act morally when we are in doubt?

4. Argument against abortion

Based on the view of Christianity with regard to the moral status of the foetus, which is that the foetus has full moral status just like any other human being from the moment that conception takes place and is therefore a full human being with the right to life just like any other individual, the abortion of unborn babies can be seen as murder as it deprives the foetus from its right to life. This view is called the Pro-Life argument and holds various views regarding abortion.

These views include the following:

- Abortion is murder, the counterargument on this view is that the deliberate killing of the foetus cannot be seen as murder as the foetus cannot be seen or reckoned as a human person. (Joubert & Rostoll, 2012:20) However the view of the counterargument can be proven false and the view that abortion in fact is murder can be supported based on the moral status of the foetus by various Biblical references. These references include:
 1. Luke 1:41 and 44, in these scriptures the unborn baby is referred to as “babe” which is the same word used in Luke 2:12 and 16 where the born baby is also referred to as “babe”. This supports the view that the unborn baby has the same moral status as that of a born baby. (Geisler, 2010:148)
 2. The punishment for a person that causes harm or death to another person is that he shall be bodily harmed or killed as is described in Genesis 9:6, in Exodus 21:22-24 the same punishment is described to any human being that harms or kills a baby that’s still in his mothers womb. (Geisler, 2010:148)
- Abortion sets a dangerous precedent, the counterargument states that even though abortion is legal in many countries for many years no attitude which views killing as right has been observed and no casual attitude towards human life has been accepted. (Joubert & Rostoll, 2012:20). A Biblical argument on this point proving that murder can cause a precedent can be found in:
 1. Genesis 4:11 where the killing of human beings is condemned where God curses Cain for the killing of his brother Abel, from this verse it is clear that God showed man that killing is wrong and immediately acted in order to prevent a precedent permitting murder from forming. (Geisler, 2010:148)
- Abortion involves psychological risks to the woman, the counterargument states that the majority of women that have undergone abortions seems to be having no psychological issues stemming from this experience (Joubert & Rostoll, 2012:20). The Biblical evidence which supports this view of the pro-life movement is:
 1. In Isaiah 49:15 it asks the question whether or not a mother can forget her sucking child, which she clearly cannot as a tie between them is formed and they are one due to the umbilical cord that connects them. Therefore this scripture supports the view that abortions can pose psychological risks to the mother as she will not be able to forget the baby she has aborted.

- Alternatives to abortion are available, the counterargument however states that the pain and suffering as well as psychological damage a woman who carries an unwanted child to term can be worse than that of having an abortion (Joubert & Rostoll, 2012:20). The Bible does not mention any instance where an unwanted baby is either aborted or carried to term, therefore no relevant scripture to support this view within the pro-life camp can be cited. However it must be noted that all life is a gift from God and a special tie exists between mother and baby and aborting a foetus will still be more traumatic than considering and giving the baby up for adoption, which is the alternative option for the abortion of unwanted babies.
- Women must be responsible for their sexual activity, the counterargument states that no form of birth control except abstinence is 100% effective and saying that every unwanted pregnancy is due to the carelessness of the woman is not fair (Joubert & Rostoll, 2012:21). The counterargument touches on the Biblical principle of having sexual intercourse by stating that abstinence is the best form of birth control as most abortions are due to couples who are not married fall pregnant and thus want to abort the baby due to shamefulness of their act. The Biblical support for this view is:
 1. Fornication which is the consensual sexual intercourse between two people who is not married is condemned by the God and is clearly stated so in Galatians 5:19.

5. Conclusion

When one consider all of the above it is clear that abortion is not the correct option and is in clear contradiction with the Bible and the values and guidelines which makes out part of it as identified and prescribed by God. But the choice to abort remains that of the pregnant mother to make.

References

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