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The Relationship Between Abortion and Personhood

“Abortion is one of the most common medical procedures performed in the United States each year. More than 40% of all women will end a pregnancy by abortion at some time in their reproductive lives. (Trupin, n.d.)” Abortion is a very controversial topic in the bioethics realm. Personally, I am ambivalent toward this topic. I believe that women have the right to choose because it is their body, or if they are a victim of extreme circumstances. But I also believe that a fetus encompasses personhood throughout their development and should not be obliterated, as they have feelings and emotions just as a matured human being. After researching and reading an article about this topic called “Abortion, Bioethics, and Personhood: A Philosophical Reflection,” I have concluded that though women have the right to choose, the fetuses well-being needs to be examined as well. In this paper, I illustrate that Beckwith’s article about the relationship between abortion and personhood is well grasped through research, and concludes that abortion is overall morally wrong, but fails to justify that in some cases women are victims and have the right to choose.

I have extracted the main argument from an article by Francis J. Beckwith and presented reasoning and evaluations. The extracted argument is as follows:

1. Human persons ought not to be either subjects of research or killed without justification. (Premise 1)
2. If human persons ought not to be either subjects of research or killed without justification, then the exercises of embryo experimentation and abortion on human fetuses is morally wrong. (Premise 2)
3. Therefore, the exercises of embryo experimentation and abortion on human fetuses is morally wrong. (Conclusion)

The first premise of this argument explains the common understanding that using living human beings as subjects of research and/or killing without an extremely rational explanation is completely unacceptable. The second premise illustrates that if a fetus is considered a human person at the time of conception, then, just like premise one stated, it is morally wrong to research on or murder a human being, regardless of the stage in development. The conclusion of this argument clearly states that exercises of research or killing on humans, such as embryo experimentation and abortion are morally wrong.

Though Beckwith seems to agree with his main argument full-heartedly, he attempts to deciphers both sides of the argument throughout the article. He explains that many are neutral about this topic, since there are too many factors that come into account. This is also the reason why Court systems have remained at a neutral stand-still. Even if many believe it isn’t right, how can our government make laws against abortion, knowing that women have a right to their own body? This is the main controversy involving abortion. Some suggest that abortion is a fundamental right, while others say it is murder. But Beckwith brings up a very strong, valid point that we should all consider, when does life begin and when, if ever, does the right to abortions begin?

Many believe that life begins at conception, but at what point does the fetus have feelings. This brings up a legitimate question, is there a point in the development of a fetus when it is acceptable to abort? This article suggests, “Some argue that personhood does not arrive until brain waves are detected (40 to 43 days). Others define a person as a being who can engage in cognitive acts such as sophisticated communication, consciousness, solving complex problems, self-motivated activity and having a self-concept. This would put the arrival of personhood at some time after *birth*.” It is difficult to determine the exact point when personhood arises in a fetus, making it hard to justify aborting a fetus even in the early stages of development. There are many different sides of this argument, which is why I believe many are neutral on the topic.

I agree completely with Beckwith’s argument. The killing of a human fetus is morally wrong, but I also believe that women have a right to choose without fear of being chastised. The only objection to this argument that I can gather is that Beckwith failed to explore the certain circumstances that could be considered morally justified, such as women who are victims of rape or incest. I feel as though this is an important part of the discussion about abortion. These women deserve to have the choice to use this procedure if they deem necessary without prosecution, along with any other woman. There are probably a small percentage of women who actually seek abortion for this reason, but this could be a scenario where abortion isn’t considered morally wrong because these women are victims of a crime. Though this idea is well-grounded, some may have a counterargument, that regardless of the circumstances it is still the killing of a fetus.

Beckwith concludes that, “because human beings are persons that maintain identity through time from the moment they come into existence, it follows that the unborn are human persons of great worth because they possess that nature as long as they exist.” He also states that even though personhood criteria are riddled with serious problems, prolife advocates, such as himself, have been given no real reason to abandon their belief. I have concluded that along with many I remain neutral about this topic. In this paper, I have illustrated that Francis Beckwith’s article about the relationship between abortion and personhood is well grasped though research, and concludes that abortion is overall morally wrong, but fails to justify that in some cases women are victims, having the right to choose and not be criticized. Overall I believe this article is very well written and researched, thoroughly bringing up a solid argument, but also explaining both sides of the argument about abortion.

References

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