

Abortion Decisions and Motherhood Identity: A Review

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Abstract:

Abortion is one of the most controversial issues which revolve round the bodily right of the mother and the right to life of the fetus. Abortion is the way to end pregnancy either spontaneously or medically and surgically before the child is born. There might be numerous causes to opt for abortion, yet it should be the special responsibility of the mothers at least to refrain from performing actions that leads to irreversible harms to their off-springs in order to avoid significantly lesser harms to themselves. So the mothers should be virtuous having truthfulness, courage and care in themselves.

Keywords: Abortion, Mother, Virtue

Abortion is the mechanism of early termination of pregnancy by the expulsion or removal of the fetus. Abortion, which occur spontaneously are termed as miscarriage and those with the intervention of medication and surgical procedure are termed as induced abortion. In my paper I would like to discuss whether abortion is moral or immoral and the ideal role the mother should play in abortion. The decision of abortion is personal and is a complex consideration. People chose induced abortion for a variety of reasons, which includes the non-wanting of child at that particular point, health concerns associated with pregnancy or sudden unexpected fetal diagnosis. Since it is the mothers who are related directly to abortion, importance should be given in understanding their attitudes and choices.

During pregnancy the fetus uses the mother's body for its growth and survival; hence a debate starts regarding her responsibility and autonomy. Discussions revolve around the moral status of the fetus, bodily right of the mother, structure of the family and society and the laws of the state. It is usually said that in case of voluntary pregnancy, the mother directly brings the child to existence, unlike pregnancy by rape cases; hence the mother has the responsibility to carry the pregnancy to full term. But this is not that easy to say, because the mother is neither just a vessel to carry the fetus nor its caretaker. She has the right to take abortion decision and moral deliberation. In voluntary intercourse, the mother perhaps has performed a certain act where she knew the child would be conceived. But this in no way binds her to consenting to gestate the child. She has not voluntarily taken the responsibility of letting the child use her womb, in certain cases. So until the mother takes the child home from the birth center, the duties and responsibilities of parenthood does not accrue.

In several cases we find that the choice to expel the child is taken because the end sought is avoiding being the parent but its death is unintentional. In fact the abortion is to be considered unsuccessful if the child somehow survives. However a pregnant lady should not have less serious reasons to terminate the pregnancy. Choosing not to provide bodily support to the embryo can be due to economic instability in

family, serious illness of the mother, down-syndrome of the fetus and the like. But there is a difference between not doing something that would help someone, and doing something knowing it will harm someone. In other words, the difference is between 'letting die' and 'killing'. It is more difficult to justify the second one. Abortion is direct killing of the fetus or a process where the removal of the fetus will ultimately lead to its death. In hysterotomy, where we find abdominal incision is given to the woman letting the fetus die, philosophers like Powel, Foot notices it to be a case of active disconnection of baby's placenta from the mother's womb done by the doctor actively and hence is direct killing. Another method, hysterectomy is the process of directly removing the uterus and the fetus. Whatever the type of removal is, ultimately it is the fetus which suffers from not being able to have a future like us.

Suppose the mother takes home the newly born child, because she could not afford abortion or that she lives in a society which is totally unaware of induced abortion. If she abandons the baby, it will simply be returned to her. Here the parents have not voluntarily taken the responsibility of the child, or given any consent to build up any personal relationship with it.

Another option which can be done instead of aborting the child is to give the child for adoption. But often this option is not chosen because they may not find families to give their child, and they might not like the idea of another person living in the world who has their DNA. She intends the fetus to end up in death without any further relationship. The concept of artificial womb or incubator also does not often a good option because such transfers are currently impossible, highly expensive and the fetus may die due to this transfer. We can imagine cases where the intention of the parents is only to cause death of the fetus because she herself will not raise the child nor will allow it to be raised by someone else. This is however impermissible, because we cannot take someone's life for our own wish. It is claimed that the woman 'begot' the child in case of voluntary intercourse and not so if the pregnancy arise due to rape. To 'beget' the child is to cause it to exist, unlike rape cases where the fetus is totally uninvited. However it is argued that the mother, in voluntary intercourse also, does not invite the embryo as if it was floating in the air.

There is a difference between voluntarily bringing about a state of affair, and voluntarily doing an action which would lead to a certain state of affair. In voluntary intercourse also, the mother does not directly brings a state of affair for which the embryo demands her body. She voluntarily brings a state of affair where the male partner has sexual intercourse with her, and it is foreseen that this might lead to a further state of affair by bringing the embryo into existence.

A dichotomy is met with when it is said that the mother is responsible and she has moral obligation to provide assistance to the embryo. It is true that the embryo needs the mother for its shelter and nutrition, so in the first sense the woman is responsible for the fact that the fetus exists as she has engaged herself in intercourse. In the second sense, the mother is responsible for the fact that given the needy person exists; she is not responsible for the needy person's neediness. In rape case, unlike the non-rape cases, the term responsibility is used in the first sense, for in the rape case, the woman is not responsible for the fact that the fetus exists, while in the non-rape case, the woman is responsible for the existence of the fetus. The rape case is like the non-rape case in terms of the responsibility in the second sense for in the two cases; the woman has no responsibility for the fact that the embryo needs her support, given the fetus already exists.

The mother's gestating a child is often compared like allowing someone to use her kidneys or even donation of various organs. Even though the period is nine months, yet right to ownership of the woman says that her organs are totally hers's and has belonged to her far before the arrival of the fetus. But the

act which causes significantly worse harm to the child, ending all its future possibilities is not accepted. The woman taking help of abortion is to be considered callous, whimsical, selfish, but never immoral. However it should be the special responsibility of the pregnant woman at least to refrain from performing actions that causes irreversible harms to their off-springs in order to avoid significantly lesser harms to themselves.

The woman has a special relationship with her child in virtue of being the biological mother. This parental relationship itself is a deep relationship of love and care. The parents are in a certain sense continued and prolonged in their off-springs. So this mother-child relationship is not like the relationship between the landlady and her tenant. Pregnancy may impose several restrictions on the mother, be it for few months, but it is not nearly as bad as death, which is a harm of different category altogether. So abortion, which often turns out to be violent, is not just bad in degrees than the difficulty involved in pregnancy; it is the worst possible option. The embryo did not force itself to enter the woman's body; but simply grows and develops in a way very natural to it. The baby does not perform any action that in any way be construed as aimed at violating the mother.

The role of the mother is thus very crucial in abortion. It is true that even if the fetus is a person, the mother can abort it if necessary. But this decision must be rational and morally supportable. A woman's right to choose, if she wants to terminate pregnancy, is often viewed as the fundamental aspect of her reproductive freedom. However the moral status of the fetus and the potential conflict between the mother's right to ownership and the embryo's right to life is a central ethical debate. So the role of virtue ethics is very important because the character and the moral development of the mother are to be taken under consideration. A virtuous person takes the right decision in any ethical controversy like abortion. The mother should be free from any prejudice and external pressure while taking decision of abortion. Mother has right to prioritize minimum suffering and maximum happiness. She should have the basic traits of virtue like courage, compassion and truthfulness. Her motive and intention should be clear that she is not aborting for any trivial reason like figure maintaining. Her decision should be morally mature, thoughtful and sincere.

Since the fetus is not just within her, but a part of her, she should not regret latter for taking this stern decision. When a mother decides aborting she defines the meaning of her life and responsibilities. Maternal identity involves care, practical insight and social responsibility. She should not set herself as an example of bad motherhood. She must not choose abortion as a way to escape from the hassles of motherhood, but must be aware of her limitations, intentions and honesty. A strong and moral character is expected from the mother for virtue ethics does not glorify nor condemns abortion. She should follow the golden rule that we should do to others what we are glad was done to us. She must be happy because her mother refrained herself from termination of pregnancy, resulted in her birth. So she must also refrain from terminating her pregnancy for trivial reason which would result in the birth of a new life.

Neither she should follow the Deontological rule that abortion is wrong in all cases even when it leads to the death of the mother; nor should she indulge in abortion for her personal preference. The decision of abortion should not be done only for the consequence, but should understand the real gravity of life. Thus the ethical debate surrounding abortion is multifaceted. There is no single universally accepted answer to the query whether abortion is moral. So the mother should take the decision by considering all the perspectives virtuously.

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