
Abortion:A Religious and Scientific Analysis

Abstract

The issue of abortion is probably one of the most controversial and emotive topics in the contemporary society, especially in the United States of America. Pro-choice and pro-life debaters have always engaged in very emotive debates on the subject of abortion. On one hand, the “pro-choice” group encourage the legalization of abortion and have always underlined the right of woman to choose whether she wishes to bring an embryo or fetus to term, and on the other hand, the “pro-life” movement support the illegalization of abortion and emphasize the right of the embryo or fetus to be born. The debaters of this issue follow some distinct religious and scientific reasoning to either support or oppose abortion.

Therefore, this research paper will discuss specifically and objectively on how science and religion forged today’s law of abortion in the United States of America from the perspective of the pro-choice and pro-life movement.

Sara, a twenty-five year old woman, who came back from her honeymoon learned after six months that she was holding the biggest dream of her husband; a baby boy. On her eighth month, this joy was replaced by pain and suffering because she was going through inexplicable complications that were getting progressively worse. Eventually, she went with her husband to the hospital to check up the reason of her mysterious situation, and she was told that her complications turn out to be so severe that they might cost her life or the baby’s life. She is now facing a dilemma; whether to save her own life by aborting her baby and not introducing him to the world, or to save her baby’s life and let him live without a mother. What is right decision?

All my life, I have grown ignoring discussions regarding abortion, and disregarded its value and importance. I never understood the reason why people gave so much importance for this topic till the day where someone close to me confronted Sara’s dilemma, and went through a long-term depression.

Perhaps giving a glimpse into the historical overview of abortion will provide a comprehensive picture of the real issues about this topic.

After seeing the way abortion affects the parents, and especially the mother, I have discovered based on the World Organization Statistics (WHO) that every year in the world, about 40 to 50 million women faced with an unplanned pregnancy decide to have an abortion. This corresponds to approximately 125,000 abortions per day where 3000 are made in the United States of America. Moreover, 22% of all pregnancies in the USA (excluding miscarriages) end in abortion, which is about the quarter of its population. These numbers according to National Rights to Life (n.d) could be much higher if the annual reports counted the number of expectant mothers that procure illegal abortion. According to Mesce and Clifton (2011), abortion is a very controversial issue that has always been discussed from socio-cultural, moral, religious and political dimensions. Its debates have often been segregating with the pro-life and pro-choice movements that have always antagonized each other’s arguments (Kaczor, 2013). Pro-choice supporters say that abortions are simple procedures, which cause relief, freedom and no harm

to the woman, whereas pro-life supporters claim that abortions are dangerous and cause regret, depression, and complications in later pregnancies (Kelly, 1990). Moreover, shocking figures of abortions in the United States of America on annual basis have set some worrying trends in a country that is almost divided within its midst because of the issue of abortion. In other words, abortion law varies between states. For example, it is legal in North Carolina to abort a child unlike in Idaho where women are charged and arrested for aborting (Marcotte, 12). Strict laws in some states against abortion have pushed a majority of women to procure illegal and unprofessional abortions that have led to death and unstable health conditions but also, it has created and increased a number of responsible families (Mesce & Clifton, 2011). Therefore, this paper will present the arguments of today's law of abortion in the United States of America from both pro-choice and pro-life's point of view based on scientific and religious beliefs.

Legalization or Illegalization Battles On Abortion in the US

Pro-life debaters on abortion in the US are those ardent campaigners who believe that women should have a choice to make in relation to carrying their pregnancies until delivery or terminating their fetuses' lives (potential future human beings) at their own will. This argument brings to question, when does human life begin? The answer to this question normally brings up more controversies on the issue of abortion since each side of the debate believe in a different point of view altogether. Pro-choice debaters believe a fetus has not attained the status of human personhood while pro-life argue that a human being's life begin at conception. One cannot rule out the arguments from either side of the debate. In order to elaborate on this aspect, Dorothy E. McBride in her book 'Abortion in the United States: a reference handbook', delved into the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church for example. According to McBride (2007), the Roman Catholic Church teaches that sex outside marriage is as sin. Therefore, unwanted pregnancies that would warrant termination are wrong in the face of God altogether. This assertion means that women and men in marriage should strictly use sex for procreation. Butts and Rich (2013) upheld a similar opinion when they argued that human life, based on cultural values and different religious faiths begin at conception. Probably, this is the reason as to why some states in the US ban abortion completely. A state like Idaho has very strict laws on abortion and both expectant women and abortion service providers can be taken to jail if found to be engaging in the practice (Marcotte, 2011). A zygote acquires moral status because of being a potential human being immediately conception takes off based on the beliefs of the pro-life groups. This kind of view might look bizarre to biologist and other human reproduction scientists who might be holding contrary beliefs. At the same time, different Christian denominations are not unanimous on their views on when personhood begins. Butts and Rich (2013) noted that there is a range of period when different religious denominations will view fetus as a person, for example, immediately after conception up to the time when a baby is immediately born or when it can breathe independently. Pro-life groups squarely provided support to their arguments on grounds of their belief that a fetus is a person.

The pro-life campaigners have not only stopped at the argument that 'life begins at conception', they have also gone ahead to argue that abortion of fetus which is considered a person from conception is utterly wrong on religious moral grounds. Many faiths do not condone killing of human beings since it is believed that it is only God who gives life and thus has the powers to take away somebody's life (Kaczor, 2013). Conventional laws on the other hand do not clearly spell when human life begins. However, law does not ignore the death of other human beings irrespective of age and thus people must not allow punitive laws that will only add

to the mystery of the unborn 'persons'. Allowing abortion is like fully accepting the fact that medical practitioners can easily get away with a legalized murder of the unborn. Very many religious groups thus believe that abortion, if legalized in the US will be akin to disrespecting the sanctity of human life in the country. Many people strongly believe in the sanctity laws and have ostensibly drummed up support for abolition of abortion across the world not just in the U.S. alone. If life begins at conception based on the assumptions by the pro-life group then there is no way how abortion can be permitted to take place within the precincts of the moral law of justice. The pro-life have also gone further to argue that even the constitutional law punishes those who choose to take away the lives of other people (Curran, 2002).

The pro-life campaigners have also claimed that pregnancies that are carried to their full lengths do not predispose mothers to some of the complications that have always been associated with pro-abortion arguments. In fact the pro-life groups argue that a lot of women who have aborted have always regretted their choices and sense of guilt that comes after termination of life of the unborn (Foster et al, 2011). The crux of the divergent opinions on pro-choice and pro-life debaters is fully based on one's belief on when human life begins. According to Lawler et al (2005) embryo in the womb has life characteristics similar to those of fully grown human persons like growth, ability to sense some stimuli as well as adaptation. Kaczor (2013) added that due to potential of an embryo developing into a human being, many faiths regard abortion as typical murder that violates God's laws. Looked at critically, these are the very qualities that human beings possess that make them protected by human rights. The law protects human life and if embryo is a form of life, then they need to apply the law that supports the protection of human beings. At the back of everyone's mind is the fact that an embryo is a form of life even if its form of life is not similar to that of human persons. Fetuses that results from human conception leads to the eventual development into human persons once they are allowed to grow into maturity. Pro-choice groups thus believe that when a pregnancy is terminated, it is similar to terminating life of a person.

Pro-life groups have also claimed that embryo in the womb of woman is not part of her body tissues the way pro-choice campaigners argue. For instance, some pro-life campaigners have always argued that a fetus has its own unique DNA structure that makes it distinct form of life and not just a piece of a growing cell in the mother's womb (Reiman, 1999). Some pro-abortion debaters have argued that a fetus cannot be treated as a human being because they cannot fend for themselves and carry out some vital functions on their own. But the pro-life groups have contrastingly argued that in any environment in or outside the womb, human being depends on their environments for food and protection. In the same parameter of argument, fetus' life also depends on the womb environment where they get nourishment for growth and development of vital organs. The provisions from the mother to the fetus do not influence their unique power of growth which is just but a natural process that take place just like that of a small baby that would grow into a toddler and finally into an adult. According to McMahan (2002) this functional independence of fetuses in the womb, make pro-life campaigners believe that people do not need to narrow their perspectives on fetus. The pro-life groups add that there are no logics in the arguments of the pro-choice groups who argue that life does not begin at conception. They (pro-life) argue that the position of pro-choice puts them in a paradox that only contradicts their own arguments. The pro-life believe that human life begins its journey from an embryo as it moves through the fetus stage and then finally into born as an infant that will grow all the way into becoming an adult. Fetuses should therefore not be curtailed from developing into a full human being that they are pre-destined to become by the laws of nature (Marzilli, 2005). This argument on the development of a human is being from an embryo into a fetus and finally into a

baby, and an adult gives a full life cycle of human beings strengthen the position of the pro-life groups' arguments.

Pro-life groups have also taken the debate to the women themselves by claiming that the independence that women might be claiming to be in need of when it comes to controlling their fertility could just be a trivial issue. There could be nothing as total autonomy when it comes to controlling one's life on activities that defy ethics of life and moral laws. Quite a number of people have been wooed into supporting feminists' points of view when it comes to the emotive issue of supporting abortion. However, human life and feminists' ideologies are quite far apart from feministic campaigns of total body control among women (White, 2009). The pro-life groups have also called for total abstinence among women who are in need of total body control if at all they want to achieve fertility control over their bodies (Purdy, 1996). With this argument, pro-life groups are able to engage feminists who might be carried away to ostensibly support women's cause while forgetting that human life begins at conception and not at birth.

Arguments that are advanced by the Pro-Choice Groups on Abortion

According to McBride (2007) abortion debates are cyclic and have been within the public and legislative sphere from the 1970s. Issues that have always brought about tough debates related to policy proposals by the government at federal or states level in the US. Such debates according to McBride (2007) do not go away, they are ever re-emerging. That is why the frame reference when it comes to abortion debates has always been the same over the years. In this section of the paper, focus will be drawn on how pro-choice campaigners frame their opinions on abortion debates in order to win the support of the masses to their side. It quite imperative to note that each and every side of this debate are equally important in enabling the society to delineate some of the intricate complexities that lies beneath the abortion debate. Without the pro-life and pro-choice groups, perhaps the society would be sinking into the abyss of immorality by permitting large scale and arbitrary abortions in the US. On the other hand, pro-choice campaigners have enabled the society to give some room albeit in very limited circumstances for women with very genuine medical conditions to procure abortion. It is on this basis that pro and cons of abortions are very important on either side of the debate.

First, the supporters of pro-choice have always argued that women have an absolute right to their body control and therefore can do whatever anything they could be willing to do with it. Therefore, with a growing fetus in the womb for example, of an expectant mother, she can choose out of her-self will, the decision to abort the fetus. This is so because, arguments of pro-choice a fetus has not yet reached the level of optimal functionalities that can make it to be considered as a human being (Kennedy & Newcombe, 2003). If this argument is held to account for some of the legal abortions, then it in deed it becomes a reprieve of women who could be carrying unwanted pregnancies. It also gives women a chance to terminate pregnancies so long as they do not feel happy at the prospects of carrying pregnancy. Unfortunately, there is no state in the U.S that gives women the arbitrary power to make a choice in regard to termination of pregnancy without certification from a qualified medical practitioner (McBride, 2007). If fetuses are held as incapable forms of life that cannot sufficiently be defended on the basis of human rights then as per the arguments that are raised by the pro-choice, it beats the logic to advocate human rights for fetuses whose lives are fully dependent upon another life that has those rights. It should be the rights of the mother that should be advocated to and not for a 'potential human being' (Kennedy & Newcombe, 2003).

Second, the pro-choice groups have also argued that an unwanted pregnancy should be terminated just before it plunges the expectant mother into more psychological and even economic tortures. This argument is also tied to the fact that some pregnancies occur as a result of incest as well rape. In deed, it is true that a woman might experience discomfort as result of carrying a child who is not willfully conceived. Instead of letting girls or women who have been raped to carry with them guilt that would last a lifetime, the pro-choice are always of the opinion that such women can be taken through counseling and be allowed to make independent choices of whether to terminate such pregnancies or not. Marcotte (2010) argued that women who find the laws stringent on allowing them to procure an abortion would only opt for septic abortion that is quite dangerous for their health. A research that was conducted in 1996 by Melisa M. Holmes, Heidi S. Resnick, Dean G. Kilpatrick, Connie L. Best on rape and its relationship with pregnancies revealed some staggering national statistics of women and girls who fall pregnant in American annually due to rape. According to Holmes et al (1996) nationally the rape victim pregnancies stood at 5% of all girls and women between the age of 12 and 45 who became victims to rape. The study also revealed that a whopping 32,101 of women get pregnant annually in America as result of rape. Out of sub set sample of the surveyed population, Holmes et al (1996) revealed that out of 34 singled out cases of rape victims who fell pregnant as a result of rape, majority the victims were adolescent girls. Out of the 34 cases, Holmes et al (1996) added that, only 32.4% agreed to keep the infant while 50% procured abortion while 11.8% suffered the ill fate of spontaneous abortion. While some of the younger rape victims could be lucky to get medical attention, some end up falling pregnant without knowing until the second trimester as the case of 32.4% of the victims in this study (Holmes et al, 1996). What this study revealed is there is a higher likelihood that rape victims who fall pregnant might chose to abort. If the process is stringent then quite a number of young victims might turn to unscrupulous doctors who can destroy their lives altogether as many pro-choice have opined in the past and present.

Third, the pro-choice have also laid a claim that religious morals that the pro-life support are just but a guise under which religious bodies wants to have influence over women's affairs including fertility. In fact pro-choice group have also added on their claim that, society can only attain an advancement for women when, it gives women space to control their own fertility. A case in point could be teenage pregnancies that might rather turn into burden to the economies and the young teenage mothers who do not have form of a job. Carmen Solomon-Fears, a social policy strategist in his report 'Teenage Pregnancy Prevention: Statistics and Programs' delved into the issue of teenage pregnancies and what could be done to prevent such pregnancies. In 2011, according to Solomon-Fears (2013), 8.4% deliveries were accounted by teenagers. Out of all the teenagers who gave birth in that year, 18.4% get birth out of wedlock. Although Solomon-Fears (2013) noted that teenage pregnancies and births have been on the decline in the last few years, the U.S has comparatively maintained higher teenage birth rates among her developed countries counterparts. In the year 2008 alone Solomon-Fears (2013) added, an approximated 733, 000 fell pregnant in the US and 192, 000 chose to abort legally. With such numbers assume that all the 733, 000 gave birth that would have accounted for over 0.7 million new people in the US. In most cases these teenager do not have a job of their own and if they society compels them to give birth then they are being put into problems (Solomon-Fears, 2013). That is why the argument by the pro-choice to have teenagers have the choice to either carry their pregnancies to full term or terminate it could be important.

Pro-choice does not only include the lay public but also some medical doctors who have claimed that there are specific conditions that can warrant an abortion on medical grounds.

According to Parens (2000), medical experts can recommend an abortion to take place if it is discovered that fetus developing into a child will have serious health conditions that would make their lives to be plainly painful. Such medical problems under which abortion can be accepted include; a child who would be mentally defects, physically deformed to bear life. Economic problems can also warrant an abortion. These conditions of abnormalities could be sufficient enough to make doctors advice an expectant mother to consider having an abortion. Kaczor (2013) argued that in certain cases, a woman or might have tried so much to get a child but it turns that when a woman finally conceives, her fetus is discovered to have 'Down's Syndrome' for example. In such cases Kaczor (2013) added that prospective parents might want to get discouraged even develop feelings of disappointments. Abortion in such a case if approved by a medical doctor could be the only way to save a family or an expectant mother from pain. That is why pro-choice campaigners have always argued that expectant mothers should have autonomy to make decisions in the best of their interests.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is evident that, abortion is a very emotive topic where pro-life and pro-choice debaters have always engaged in cyclic debates about what should be right and what should be wrong. Unfortunately, there has never been objective conclusion on who is right and who is wrong. This paper had only sought to examine some of the reasoning basis that pro-life and pro-choice debaters do bring on board to counter each other opinions and arguments. What anyone can see in these debates is that there are some very salient issues that pro-life groups bring on board like the issue of where life begins. At least there is a consensus among the pro-life and pro-choice groups that an embryo that develops in a woman's womb after female egg cell fertilization is a form of life. As a womb turns in fetus it progressively comes closer to taking human form and that is why some religious denominations do not condone abortion after some specific times of pregnancy. On the other hand, pro-choice groups believe that women should be given a chance to have full control over their lives and even on the issues of fertility. So far, resolving the issue of when life begins is an ongoing debate with so resolution in sight. In the meantime, many women could be suffering with pregnancies arising from rape or incest while others could be facing the gravest health conditions because of pregnancies but cannot abort because of religious morals. This paper has objectively presented pros and cons from either side of the debate without taking emotional or biased judgment on who is wrong and who is right in their arguments against or in support of abortion.