
The Pro-Life Abortion Debate: a Pro-Life Perspective

The issue of abortion has always been a very controversial topic in our society. Abortion poses a social, moral, and medical crisis that causes many individuals to develop an emotional and aggressive mood. Many individuals have different thoughts, ideas, and opinions toward the issue of abortion, but the two main distinctions are “pro-life” and “pro-choice”. People who are “pro-life” believe that the fetus or embryo is alive even from the moment of conception. People who are “pro-choice” believe that it should be up to the mother to decide whether or not to abort a pregnancy. Also, they believe that the state has no right to make the decision for the mother. From my perspective, I truly believe that the mother should have the right to decide whether or not to abort a pregnancy, hence making me “pro-choice”. In this essay, I will be critically analyzing Michael Tooley’s article “Abortion and Infanticide” and James Rachel’s thought experiment to emphasize that they believe it is permissible to kill newborn infants. I will also be critically analyzing Don Marquis’s, “Why Abortion is Immoral” to show how he believes that it’s impermissible to kill an innocent newborn baby. I agree and disagree with the permissibility of abortion. I personally believe that it is wrong to abort a pregnancy, since that would be killing an innocent human being. But in certain situations including when a mother gets raped, that’s when I find it permissible to kill a newborn infant. In most cases, mothers who are raped would not want to keep the baby inside of her. That’s exactly why it should be the mother’s decision to choose whether or not to abort a pregnancy.

In 1983, Michael Tooley published the article “Abortion and Infanticide”. This article is very powerful because Tooley expresses his opinions and arguments regarding the issue of abortion. His main arguments include the following: “only persons have a right to life; newborn babies are not persons; for that reason they do not have the right to life; as a result, it is permissible to abort newborn babies.” (Tooley, 1983) Many individuals disagree with Tooley’s arguments and they believe in the typical objection. The typical objection I am referring to is also known as the potential personhood objection. The potential personhood objection states that even if newborn babies are not officially persons yet, they are on their way to actually becoming persons. Tooley counters the argument that “newborn babies are on their way to becoming persons” by using two key premises. The first claim states that there is no duty to act so to transform potential/ developing persons into actual persons. The second claim states that there is no significant moral difference between omission and acts. From the coincidence of these two premises, it shows that there is nothing wrong with taking active steps to impede a potential person from developing into an actual person. This supports the claim that it is permissible to kill a newborn infant.

Tooley has his own take on the idea of personhood. Tooley considers a person as any being with the belief of itself as a “continuing subject of experiences”. (Tooley, 1983) Especially, as a being that is living, it has a notion of self and has a notion of this self, existing through life. He defends his view that only beings with this type of self-concept have a right to life. Obviously, many individuals would disagree with that statement, but what does it tell us about potential persons? Tooley seems to recognize “potentiality” in terms of counterfactual circumstances. In fact, he believes that a being has the potential to develop into a person if, some possible world, it has the potential to become a person. Tooley uses a specific concept of possibility but it’s not clear which one he is working with here. Obviously, it cannot be logical or conceptual possibility

because there is nothing logically contradictory in the idea of a potential world in which lamps can transform into persons, but that definitely does not mean that my lamp in this world is an actual person. This just shows that it must be a constrained/forced concept of possibility. In this case, I believe that Tooley is using a combination of both technological and physical possibility. In other words, he would defend his view that if it were technologically and physically possible to turn my lamp into a person,

it then would be considered a potential person. This is based on the thought experiment, which is what Tooley uses to support and defend the first premise of his argument. The thought experiment (Personhood Serum) in a brief summary is the following: "Pretend that scientists/researchers invented a serum that, when inserted into a cat, will make them have the mental abilities that are considered necessities for becoming a person. This would mean that the cat is a person or potential person. Do we have a duty to inject the serum into all the cats?" (Tooley, 1983) Tooley's insight, is that even though cats are now considered to be potential persons, we are not obligated to inject the serum into the cats. This means that, it is not required to turn a potential/developing person into an actual person. Furthermore, this is also Tooley's first premise of his argument.

Tooley's second claim states that there is no moral difference between omitting (not doing something) and acting (actually doing something). This is similar to the "symmetry" principle and this is also very controversial. For example, many individuals believe that there is an important moral difference between "letting die" and killing, which established the acting/omitting disagreement. However, there are methods to defend this principle. For example, using James Rachel's thought experiment (Jones/Smith) would be a perfect way to defend and support the symmetry principle. James Rachel's thought experiment in a brief summary is the following: "Smith enters the restroom when his nephew is taking a bath. Knowing that he would gain a lot of money and inheritance from his nephew's death, Smith murders his nephew by drowning him. Jones puts himself in a similar situation as Smith by drowning the nephew. But this time when Jones enters the restroom, he finds the nephew already drowning so he just stands there and watches him drown. Is Jones and Smith equally responsible for the action?" (Rachels, 1975) The resolution here is that Jones and Smith are equally guilty since they both had the same mindset to kill the nephew and both allowed it to actually happen. This just shows that if it's permissible to not make potential persons into actual persons and if it's true that there is no moral difference between omitting/acting, than wouldn't it follow that it is permissible to prevent potential persons from developing into actual persons? Furthermore, wouldn't that be the same thing as saying that it would be permissible to kill a potential person? In other words, it's permissible to not turn a potential person into an actual person. There is nothing wrong with omitting (not doing something) and acting (actually doing something). For that reason, it is permissible to take actions that prevent potential/developing persons from becoming actual persons. Therefore, it is permissible to abort a pregnancy, hence killing a newborn infant.

Obviously, there are many individuals who disagree with the statement that killing a newborn infant is permissible. Don Marquis is a great example because he believes that abortion is impermissible. From "Why Abortion is Immoral" by Don Marquis, he states the following, "The future of a standard fetus includes a set of experiences, projects, activities, and such which are identical with the futures of adult human beings and are identical with the futures of young children. Since the reason that is sufficient to explain why it is wrong to kill human beings after the time of birth is a reason that also applies to fetuses, it follows that abortion is prima facie

seriously morally wrong.” (Marquis, 1989) Marquis’s argument is a powerful one because he considers abortion to be morally wrong and he compares it with the killing of an actual person (adult). However, Marquis promotes a new strategy. His goal is to first discover why killing an actual person (adult) is normally wrong, and to see whether or not if that specific reason can be applied to the issue of abortion. If it can, then this new strategy would support the argument that abortion is presumably immoral. Marquis argues that killing in general is morally wrong since it deprives the victim of something valuable, which is his or her life. It deprives the innocent victim of everything that he/she would have treasured in the future, had his/her life not been taken away unfairly. What’s valuable in someone’s life is not the things you can touch but are the “happy things in life” that money can’t even buy, such as various achievements, goals, relationships, once in a lifetime opportunities, and so on. Killing is definitely wrong because it completely decreases the value of those, as well as many other experiences. Marquis defends his view by using several examples to explain the wrongness of killing in this way. But most importantly, it can account for our acceptance that murder is one of the most serious and worst crimes in our society. Murder is considered one of the worst crimes in the entire world because it deprives the innocent victims of so much value and it correlates well with attitudes that the dangerously ill have toward their future/expected deaths. Furthermore, Marquis believes the theory contributes possible verdicts in many types of ethical issues. This helps us understand that active euthanasia is occasionally permissible, and it can account for the immorality of abortion/infanticide in a way that is not misleading. This just backs up the argument of abortion being presumably immoral. As newborn infants will often go on to enjoy futures that are just as important as our own lives are, it follows that preventing a fetus from having a future is a serious moral offense. Marquis is very cautious with what he says because he claims that his argument does not prove that abortion is always unethical. Nor does it prove to clarify the wrongness of all killings. Marquis ends his argument by considering possible objections others may have toward his view. First, he examines competing ideas that are meant to explain the wrongness of killing, but it would not result in abortion being presumably wrong. The first claim states that because fetuses technically cannot value their futures, this makes their futures not “valuable” to them. In a somewhat similar mood, the second claim states that a being does not have a right to life unless it purposely wants its own continued existence. Marquis believes that both of these claims are very much alike because they make a similar mistake. He argues that just because a human being does not desire or value something right away, it does not mean that thing is not desirable or valued for that human being. Finally, Marquis examines an objection regarding contraception. The objector argues that if his theory is accurate, then contraception must be unethical. But since contraception is not immoral/unethical, his theory must be wrong and untrue. He argues and emphasizes his belief that nothing is presumably wrong with contraception because no being is deprived of anything, especially a future of value.

In conclusion, both sides have really strong arguments toward the issue of abortion. The main arguments for abortion being permissible come from “Abortion and Infanticide” which is an article written by Michael Tooley. Tooley states that “only persons have a right to life; newborn babies are not persons; for that reason they do not have the right to life; as a result, it is permissible to abort newborn babies.” (Tooley, 1983) Tooley also uses different methods including the Personhood Serum and Jones/Smith thought experiment to prove that it is permissible to kill a newborn infant. On the other hand, Don Marquis believes that abortion is impermissible. He has many strong arguments to support his claim but there are specific arguments that stand out the most to me. “The Future-Like-Ours Argument” is a great example because it shows how killing a newborn infant is impermissible. This argument states that it is wrong to deprive a being of its future. The important moral category in his argument is not that

of a potential person or an actual person. Instead, it is the category of “having a valuable and worthy future like ours.” Like I stated before, I agree and disagree with the permissibility of abortion. I truly believe that it is wrong to abort a pregnancy, since that would be killing an innocent human being. Therefore, it should also be up to the mother to decide whether or not to abort a pregnancy. But under excruciating circumstances including when a mother gets raped, that’s when I find it permissible to kill a newborn infant. Usually, mothers who are raped would not want to keep the baby inside of her and I don’t blame them because I wouldn’t want too either. But I would never be able to make that decision since I am a male and cannot get pregnant.

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