

Integrating Applied Ethics with its Bio-Ethical Issues and life in the Womb

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ABSTRACT

Morality is concerned with beliefs and actions which are in conformity with the social norms shaped and modified over a length of time. The belief about what is right and what is wrong, what ought to be done and what not to be done is generally defined as moral belief. Thus, morality is an on – going process in the life of human beings from its primitive stage to the present stage. But, in this age of globalization all human beings with their rapid developments feel insecure in every spheres of life. The problems of bio-ethical issues like Abortion, Euthanasia etc are especially urgent in the present day. They are rather the problems of human beings in situations in which not only ethical decision is necessary for every moments of our life. Thus, in applied ethics ethical principles are required to be applied to solve practical moral problems.

Keywords

Morality, Bio-Ethical, Applied-Ethics, Abortion, Utilitarianism

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1. Introduction

Applied ethics is the branch of ethics which consists of the analysis of specific, controversial moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia etc. In recent years applied ethics issues have been subdivided into medical ethics, business ethics, environmental ethics etc. Thus, applied ethics is a growing interdisciplinary field dealing with ethical problems in different areas of society. While the term applied ethics gained its importance only a few decades ago. During the 2nd half of the 20th century has been the growing interest in applied ethics to practical moral problems. Philosophy has traditionally concerned itself with questions of personal morality (what should I do?) and public morality (what is the good for society?). While these questions are fundamental to applied ethics, by looking at different kinds of human practices in our life. It gives particular and direct attention to specific issues and controversies in private and public life. In the private sphere ethics issues can include matters relating to the family and in the public sphere applied ethics may involve the impact of advances in biomedical and genetics as life and death, or it could mean duties to future generations in the light of environmental problems. Thus, applied ethics is the art or science which reflects moral dilemmas and moral problems in different social contexts.

Applied ethics covers a wide area. Applied ethics has come to be recognized as an important

discipline. James M Brown has advanced the following points regarding applied ethics-----

- 1) The application of ethical theory is applied ethics.
- 2) There is well- grounded ethical theory that can be applied to practical problems.
- 3) There are many theories provided by philosophers where problems can be solving regarding bio-ethical theories.

These three are called “the engineering model of applied ethics”.(Brown James, 1987)Along with the revival of applied ethics, the striking development in moral philosophy can be seen from the relations between humans and non-humans. According to Peter Singer, Abortion, Euthanasia is not everyday decisions for most of us but they are still relevant because they can arise at sometime in our lives. The moral issues about man- nature relationship arrived because of serious problems prevalent in our society. All these issues faced by society have given rise to the extinction of the scope of applied ethics or practical ethics day by day. Thus applied ethics deals with controversial moral issues like Abortion, Euthanasia that people actually face in their lives.

II. Bio-Ethics:

The term “Bio- ethics” is the combination of “bio” representing biological knowledge and “ethics” which refers to knowledge of human value system. The issues of medical ethics come within the domain of bio- ethics. The large scale

introduction of biomedical and other technologies in second half of the 20th century has strengthened old problems and added new ones such as issue over the definition of death and withdraws of life sustaining medical treatment, abortion, the use of human, animal tissue for scientific research etc.

Today, the ethics of life covers a very wide field including surrogacy, abortion, organ transplantation, cloning etc. Thus solving bio-ethical issues is a complex one.

Here, in this paper, I like to discuss one bio-ethical issue the issue of 'Abortion' as this issue is very appealing one.

III. Abortion:

Right to Life:

Medical ethics is an important area of applied ethics and Abortion and is one of the most controversial moral issues in today's society. It is a human right issue because human beings have a right to life. Abortion is the expulsion of a fetus from the uterus before it has reached the stage of viability. An abortion may occur spontaneously in case it is also called a miscarriage, or it may be brought on purposefully in which case it often called an induced abortion. Abortion is a sensitive topic that requires a considerable amount of understanding when addressing the ethics behind it.

Now the question arises---'Is abortion morally permissible?', or under what conditions is an abortion morally permissible? Or whether fetus is a person'. In looking at the conditions surrounding a particular abortion, we are able to get a better understanding, regarding permissibility and impermissibility of abortion.

Let us take one argument against abortion—

First premise: It is wrong to kill an innocent human being.

Second premise: A human fetus is an innocent human being.

Conclusion : Therefore, it is wrong to kill a human being. (Peter Singer 1980)

This argument follows like this as every person has the right to life so the fetus has its right to life. "Every human being, even the child in the womb, has the right to life directly from God and not from his parents, not from society or human authority." (Pope Pius xii, 1951). So it is said that as long as the fetus is a human being, a person from the conception would be morally wrong to abort it.

Michael Tooley's view on Abortion:

Tooley gives two important concepts of 'Right to life'—

1 Continuing existence

2 Desires

"An organism possesses a serious right to life only if it possesses the concept of self as a continuing subject of experiences and other mental states, and believes that it is itself such a continuing entity." (Tooley-82). In other words, an organism that does not possess such a concept of self as a continuous entity will not possess the desire to be a self. So, it cannot be morally wrong to kill something which does not have the desire to exist. He also defines a person as an organism which possess right to life and so makes a distinction between a person and a human being. Fetus, he believes cannot be said as person and it is not wrong to destroy it. Tooley's notion of desires says that only certain kind of organisms can have desires which are conscious, but organisms which are not conscious cannot have desires. It is perhaps possible to believe Tooley's view that fetus do not possess a sense of self. So if we cannot identify whether fetuses are self-conscious, we cannot determine whether fetuses have a serious right to life. "It seems to a conceptual truth that things lack consciousness cannot have rights". (Tooley 65). 3

IV. Value: Fetal Life

Human is a term which consists of two distinct notions—being a person and being a member of Homo- sapiens. The modern era of obstetric therapeutics has been associated with the value of fetal life. Fetal life has always been regarded as sacred and not to destroy. But innumerable children have been allowed to die in the uterus due to some complications or by improperly performed methods for delivery. Sometimes delayed diagnosis and unsuccessful attempts at extraction leads to obstacles to a successful issue. The life of fetus and the mother's life both are having value, so the medical attendant should be more proficient in physical examination. Premature delivery in contracted pelvis, the high forceps operations leads to high fetal mortality which is impossible to remedy. Granting the importance of fetus as the living human being, it possesses its actual characteristics and values its life on the same scale as the lives of beings.

Let us take another argument-----

First premise: It is wrong to kill a potential human being.

Second premise: A human fetus is a potential human being.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is wrong to kill a human fetus. (Peter Singer 1986)

The fact that something is a potential person may be the reason for not destroying it. David Boonin's defense against abortion as he considers the human embryos and fetuses has the same right to life fully like adult human beings. So, it is reasonable to suggest that to be more like a person where it meets certain criteria of personhood; the stronger is the case for right to life and its value of the fetus.

V. Life in the Womb:

The material world is a composition of three qualities--- Sattva, Rajas, Tamas. These three qualities are present in our mind as well and they act differently at different times.

In the Bhagavatam it is said—"Deriving its nutrition from the food and drink taken by the mother, the fetus grows and remains in the abominable residence of stool and urine, which is a breeding place for all kinds of worms. Bitten again and again all over his body by these hungry worms in the abdomen itself, the child suffers terrible agony because of his tenderness. When the mother eats bitter, too salty or too sour, the body of the child incessantly suffers pains that are almost intolerable. The child's pain in the abdomen is beyond our conception, but because his consciousness is yet undeveloped, he is able to tolerate it. We as adults used to forget the sufferings and absorbed ourselves in trying to become happy in material life. Life in the womb may seem remote as no one has discussed about its actual nature. At the end of seven months in the womb, the child remains just like a bird in a cage unable to move freely and suffering without relief. Then in the womb the living being realizes that he has unnecessarily entered the material world. In this frightful condition, he prays with folded hands, appealing to the lord, who has put him there. He prays as follows: "I take shelter of the lotus feet of Lord Krishna, the supreme personality of Godhead, who appears in His various eternal forms. I the pure soul, appearing now to be bound by my activities, lying in the womb of my mother by the arrangement of Lord's energy." Srimad Bhagavatam, Bhagavad Gita)

In Srimad Bhagavatam—"In this sinful age, people have taken to the process of killing the child in the womb. This is most degraded practice.(Bhagavatam-5.17.12)

Sri Krishna states in the Bhagavad- Gita (18.61), "I am seated in everyone's heart, and I direct the wanderings of all living beings." So, if upon reaching the human form of life, we do not utilize the opportunity for self realization, we will again be forced to enter a womb and undergo repeated tortures there.

In this paper, my ethical justification for abortion stems from a utilitarianism standpoint.

VI. Utilitarian Approach:

Utilitarianism is the consequentialist ethical theory that views abortion through the principle of utility, which promotes the maximization of welfare in society. There is no absolute value placed on human life as it avoids moral questions about when human life begins—this is regarded as the great strength of utilitarianism regarding *abortion*. Based on the above questions whether abortion is permissible or not if we use the utilitarian consequential principle of ethics, we establish a set of general morals and rules in which we can apply to every moral question based upon our utilitarian findings.

Firstly, Bentham's version of utilitarianism, known as '*act utilitarianism*' is the most adequate theory. It looks at the consequences of an abortion, taking each situation into separate account of all others. It prefers to judge each individual case on its own merits that is it is very much up to the mother and what consequences would be for her life. This means circumstances such as severe fetal abnormality, rape can be considered under utilitarian thought. Thus it would then enable women who have been raped, for example, to choose whether they go ahead with the birth because they may not be able to live with the consequences of their situation to bring the child up with the history of the conception attached to the child. So, the abortion would give the mother a more pleasurable life.

Secondly, contrary to act utilitarianism '*rule utilitarianism*' believes that people should follow the standards which have been set by society. It states that we should create a rule about abortion that then applies to all circumstances, as the decision should not be bound by individual welfare but by societal welfare. A society that

recognizes the rule that permits women to choose abortion is said to be a happier society than one that thus not recognize this rule.

Thus, Mill's utilitarianism can have an impact on the way we think about our lives and our priorities. They believed abortion should be legalized as everyone should have the chance to make their own decisions in their life, especially when regarding such a personal subject as abortion. (Mill 2003) Woman has a right to bodily integrity and has the right to choose whether or not she wants to have an abortion, although it is morally wrong.

Right to bodily integrity is more moral than the right to life. So, Mill believes that one should take care of individual happiness first because in turn that will result in the happiness of others surrounding them.

VII. Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it may be concluded that a fetus being a member of the biological species homo-Sapiens it is wrong to destroy a human being. "Everyone has the right to life, so the unborn person has the right to life." (Exploring Ethics, 2009) Therefore abortion is unethical since it constitutes the deliberate destruction of a human being. Many think that right to life overrides the right to control one's own body and abortion is wrong. Thus, to solve bio-ethical issues there should be a balance among various factors—the interest of the fetus, the interest of the pregnant woman and the interest of society. Lord Krishna in Bhagavat- Gita elaborated----"Not only human and human fetuses are souls: all living beings are souls. The soul is minute but eternal spiritual entity with consciousness as its essential characteristics." So, life comes from the soul and as it is considered sacred, abortion should be completely avoided.

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