

# Applied Ethics and its Ethical Perspectives on Abortion

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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.

Thus, the present paper focuses three major points-

Firstly, it discusses about our moral beliefs and actions.

Secondly, the problems of bio-ethical issues like abortion has been taken in discussion and Thirdly, utilitarianism view on abortion is given.

**Keywords:** *Morality, Bio-ethical, Applied-ethics, Abortion, Utilitarianism.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Morality is a social enterprise, it is an instrument of society as a whole for the guidance of individuals.” (Frankena, 1970). It is a matter of the goodness of all living organism concerned. The moral rules and principles are social rules, and not ones which are spun by an individual. Morality is an on – going process in the life of human being from the very early age of the Vedas. Rather it has been recognized as the most basic element in human life. To preserve social harmony and integration, morality and moral codes are very essential in every sphere of our life.

## 2. APPLIED ETHICS

Ethical issues like Abortion, Euthanasia etc are taking on a greater importance in society and in our lives. Thus in applied ethics ethical principles are required to be applied to solve

practical moral problems. The most striking development in the study of ethics during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 28<sup>th</sup> century has been the growing interest in the field of applied ethics. Applied ethics is a discipline of philosophy that attempts to apply ethical theory to real life situation. It is application of principles to human situations where it provides relative frameworks within which practical moral problems can be solved.

Today, the ethics of life covers a very wide field including Abortion, Surrogacy, 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.’

## 3. ABORTION

Abortion is one of the controversial moral issues in today’s society. Abortion is the expulsion of a fetus from the uterus before it has reached the stage of visibility. 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 an induced abortion.

Now the question arises - “Is abortion morally permissible?” or “Under what condition is an abortion morally permissible?” In looking at these questions on abortion, we are able to get a better answers regarding permissibility and impermissibility.

### 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 any society or human authority.” (Pope Pius xii.1951).

So it is said that so long as a fetus is a human being, a person from the moment of conception, it would be morally wrong to abort it.

1st Premise: It is wrong to kill innocent human being.

2nd Premise: A human fetus is an innocent human being.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is wrong to kill a human fetus.

This argument goes like this --- Every person has the right to life. So, the fetus has a right to life. No doubt the mother has a right to decide what shall happen in or to her body.

A contemporary American philosopher Michael Tooley has given two arguments in connection to "Right to Life" in his essay 'Abortion and Infanticide'. He states that it is morally permissible to destroy a human fetus as infant, because these organisms do not have the properties that grant them a 'serious right to life' (Tooley 57, 1986). According to him, "An organism possesses a serious right to life only if it possesses the concept of a self as a continuing subject of experiences and their mental states, and believes that it is itself such a continuing entity." (Tooley, 1983).

He again states that an organisms which are not conscious cannot have desires and so cannot have rights. "It seems to be a conceptual truth that things that lack consciousness cannot have rights." (Tooley, 65).

So, he says that to apply this arguments to abortion and infanticide, it is the right of fetus as infants to assert that individual must refrain from killing them only if the fetus as infant possesses the desire not to be killed.

Tooley gives two important concept of "Right to Life"-

- a) Continuing existence
- b) Desires

#### **Fetus - potential being:**

Some people say that the fetus has the 'right to life' because it is a 'potential human being'. The 'potential human being' argument gives the right to life to the unborn from the very earliest stage of development – the moment when the egg is fertilized. The 'fetus' is a potential being, but there is no doubt that a fertilized egg is a potential being since, if the pregnancy runs its full course, it will be born as a human baby, the question is whether being a potential human being gives the fetus any right.

The potential beings does not have the same rights as actual beings. Generally we do differentiate between actual and potential beings, and we distinguish between their rights too. Many of the rights of a potential person are only potential rights --- they become actual rights when the person becomes an actual person.

#### **Utilitarian Approach:**

Utilitarianism is the thought that actions are right if they benefit or bring happiness to a majority of the population. It is chief teleological ethical theory today which considers the consequences of an action such as abortion. This ethical approach to abortion is useful because it determines that "an action is right if it produces the greatest good for the greatest number." It considers the hedonistic calculus, designed by

Bentham which weighs up the pleasure and pain generated by the available moral actions. The theory mainly focuses on both pleasure and pain and the ability to maximize pleasure over pain. It also emphasizes the ends of abortion over its means. So it judges the rightness of abortion by the end result, possible pleasure, it produces. With abortion being a personal issue, utilitarianism is the theory which looks at the consequences of an abortion, taking each situation separately. This would 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 and bring the child up with the history of the conception attached to the child. This decision of abortion can be seen to bring the greatest pleasure to the greatest number as it would less the stress of her family.

#### **Arguments for Abortion: Mill's ethical perspective -**

Mill's Utilitarianism can have an impact on the way we think about our lives and our priorities.

Abortion should be legalized is because we believe 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.

A main goal of life is to able to live the happiest, pain free life as possible. Abortion could be considered moral if the mother's life is at risk.

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 other surrounding them.

#### **4. 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 a 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 the 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.

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