

THE CONCEPT OF ABORTION AND ITS ETHICAL CONTROVERSIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Donatus, Uzoma Okwara, Ph.D

Directorate of General Studies

Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

&

Obinna, Victor Obiagwu, Ph.D

Directorate of General Studies

Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

&

Samuel, Ugochukwu Obasi, Ph.D

Directorate of General Studies

Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

&

Odera, Cosmas Udogu, Ph.D

Department of Philosophy

Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

&

Emmanuel, Ndubuisi Nwosu, Ph.D

Department of History & Industrial Studies

Kingsley Ozurumba Mbadiwe University, Ideato, Imo State, Nigeria

obinnaobiagwu71@gmail.com

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Abstract

This work delved into the multifaceted nature of abortion as an ethical controversy in today's world. It explored the historical roots, the various ethical frameworks that inform arguments on both sides of the debate, the legal landscape surrounding abortion rights, and the complex intersection of religion, morality, and public policy. A navigation through these intricacies, shows the diversity of perspectives and experiences that shape the abortion discourse. The aim is not to advocate for a particular position, but rather to foster a deeper understanding of the complexities involved and encourage thoughtful engagement with this polarizing issue. Through critical analysis and informed dialogue, the work seeks to contribute to a more nuanced and compassionate approach to addressing the ethical controversies surrounding abortion in contemporary society.

Keywords: Abortion, Controversy, Ethics, Society.

Introduction

Abortion stands at the heart of one of the most contentious and emotionally charged debates in contemporary society. Defined as the termination of a pregnancy, abortion intersects with issues of morality, autonomy, religion, law, and public health. Its ethical implications are profound, touching upon fundamental questions about the value of human life, the rights of individuals, and the responsibilities of society.

Definitions of Abortion

Some of the definitions of the term include

- 1. Medical Definition:** Abortion, in medical terms, refers to the termination of

pregnancy by the removal or expulsion of an embryo or fetus from the uterus, resulting in its death.

2. **Legal Definition:** The legal definition of abortion varies across jurisdictions but generally refers to the deliberate termination of a pregnancy before the fetus is viable outside the womb.
3. **Ethical Definition:** Ethically, abortion can be understood as a complex moral issue involving considerations of personhood, autonomy, bodily integrity, and the rights of both the pregnant individual and the developing fetus.
4. **Social Definition:** From a social perspective, abortion can be viewed as a reproductive choice made by individuals or couples in response to various factors such as personal circumstances, health considerations, socioeconomic status, and cultural or religious beliefs.
5. **Political Definition:** In the political realm, abortion is often a highly contested issue, with debates focusing on the legality of abortion, access to reproductive healthcare services, government funding, and the role of religion and morality in shaping public policy.

These definitions provide different lenses through which abortion can be understood, reflecting its multifaceted nature and the diverse perspectives surrounding it.

Historical Context of Abortion:

A. Ancient Perspectives on Abortion:

Abortion has a long history, with evidence of its practice dating back to ancient civilizations. In many ancient societies, attitudes towards abortion varied widely, influenced by cultural, religious, and practical considerations.

1. **Ancient Egypt:** Ancient Egyptian medical texts mention methods for inducing abortion, suggesting that abortion was known and practiced in this society. However, the exact attitudes towards abortion in Ancient Egypt remain unclear.

2. **Ancient Greece and Rome:** In Ancient Greece and Rome, abortion was not universally condemned. Some philosophers and medical practitioners viewed abortion as an acceptable practice under certain circumstances, such as when the health of the mother was at risk or when the fetus was thought to be deformed. However, these views were not unanimous, and there were also voices advocating for the protection of fetal life.

3. **Ancient China:** Ancient Chinese medical texts contain references to abortion techniques, indicating that abortion was practiced in ancient Chinese society. The reasons for seeking abortion in Ancient China could include considerations of family size, economic circumstances, or social status.

4. **Indigenous Cultures:** In various indigenous cultures around the world, practices related to fertility control, including abortion, were known and sometimes integrated into cultural and spiritual traditions. These practices often reflected a deep understanding of the local environment and the challenges of sustaining communities.

. Development of Abortion Laws and Practices:

Throughout history, societies have grappled with the regulation of abortion through legal and social means. The development of abortion laws and practices has been influenced by

a range of factors, including religious beliefs, moral norms, medical advancements, and political considerations.

1. **Pre-Modern Era:** In pre-modern societies, abortion was often regulated informally through religious teachings, customary practices, and community norms. Legal frameworks governing abortion were relatively rudimentary, and enforcement mechanisms varied widely.

2. **Medieval Europe:** In medieval Europe, abortion was generally prohibited by Christian authorities, who viewed it as a sin and a violation of the sanctity of life. However, enforcement of these prohibitions could be inconsistent, and attitudes towards abortion varied among different social classes and regions.

3. **Early Modern Era:** The rise of modern medicine and the Enlightenment led to new debates about abortion, with some Enlightenment thinkers advocating for greater individual autonomy and reproductive freedom. However, abortion remained largely illegal and stigmatized in many parts of the world.

4. **19th and 20th Centuries:** The 19th and 20th centuries saw the emergence of organized movements advocating for both the legalization and the restriction of abortion. These movements were shaped by changing social attitudes, scientific discoveries, and shifts in political power.

Evolution of Ethical Considerations Surrounding Abortion:

The ethical considerations surrounding abortion have evolved over time, reflecting changes in cultural values, religious beliefs, philosophical perspectives, and scientific knowledge.

1. **Religious Perspectives:** Religious traditions have played a significant role in shaping ethical attitudes towards abortion. While some religious teachings condemn abortion as a moral wrong, others emphasize compassion, mercy, and the protection of women's health and well-being.

2. **Philosophical Debates:** Philosophical debates about the moral status of the fetus, the rights of women, and the value of autonomy have influenced ethical discourse on abortion. Utilitarian, deontological, and virtue ethics approaches have all been applied to the abortion debate, leading to a rich and complex body of literature.

3. **Social Justice and Equity:** Ethical considerations surrounding abortion have increasingly focused on issues of social justice, equity, and reproductive rights. Advocates for abortion rights argue that access to safe and legal abortion is essential for women's autonomy, equality, and bodily integrity.

4. **Scientific Advances:** Scientific advancements in embryology, genetics, and reproductive medicine have also shaped ethical debates about abortion. These advances have led to new questions about the beginning of life, the nature of personhood, and the moral implications of prenatal testing and genetic screening.

Overall, the historical context of abortion reveals a complex tapestry of cultural, legal, religious, and ethical perspectives, reflecting humanity's ongoing struggle to navigate the moral complexities of reproductive decision-making.

The Ethical Frameworks and Perspectives on Abortion:

A. Utilitarian Perspective on Abortion:

Utilitarianism is an ethical theory that evaluates actions based on their consequences and seeks to maximize overall happiness or utility. From a utilitarian perspective, the morality of abortion is determined by its impact on the well-being of those involved, including the pregnant individual, the fetus, and society as a whole.

1. **Calculating Utility:** Utilitarians consider factors such as the physical and mental health of the pregnant person, the potential suffering of the fetus, and the broader social consequences of allowing or restricting abortion. They weigh the potential harms and benefits of abortion in each particular case.

2. **Consequentialist Reasoning:** Utilitarians may argue that abortion can be morally permissible or even obligatory in situations where it maximizes overall well-being. For example, if continuing a pregnancy would pose significant risks to the health or life of the pregnant person, abortion may be justified to prevent greater harm.

3. **Critiques and Challenges:** Critics of the utilitarian approach to abortion argue that it may overlook the inherent value of human life or fail to adequately consider the rights and interests of the fetus. Additionally, there may be disagreements about how to measure and compare the different forms of utility involved in abortion decisions.

Deontological Perspective on Abortion:

Deontology is an ethical theory that emphasizes the importance of moral duties, principles, and rules, regardless of their consequences. From a deontological perspective, the morality of abortion is determined by whether it conforms to certain moral principles or rules.

1. **Principle of Respect for Persons:** Deontologists may argue that all human beings, including fetuses, have inherent moral worth and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. They may view abortion as a violation of the fetus's right to life and bodily integrity.

2. **Duty-Based Reasoning:** Deontologists may contend that there are certain moral duties or obligations that individuals have towards fetuses, such as the duty to refrain from harming innocent beings or the duty to protect vulnerable individuals. They may argue that abortion is inherently wrong because it involves the intentional destruction of a human life.

3. **Absolute Prohibition vs. Conditional Allowance:** Some deontologists advocate for an absolute prohibition on abortion, arguing that it is always morally impermissible. Others may acknowledge certain exceptions, such as when the life of the pregnant person is at risk, but still maintain that abortion is generally wrong.

Virtue Ethics and Abortion:

Virtue ethics is an ethical theory that focuses on the character traits or virtues that lead to morally good actions. From a virtue ethics perspective, the morality of abortion is evaluated based on the virtues or vices exhibited by the individuals involved in the decision-making process.

1. **Character-Based Evaluation:** Virtue ethicists may emphasize the importance of virtues such as compassion, empathy, honesty, and integrity in navigating the complex moral terrain of abortion. They may focus on the moral character of the pregnant person, healthcare providers, policymakers, and others involved in abortion-related decisions.

2. **Contextual Considerations:** Virtue ethicists recognize that ethical judgments are context-dependent and may vary based on the specific circumstances of each abortion case. They may emphasize the importance of understanding the particular needs, values, and relationships of the individuals involved in abortion decisions.

3. **Balancing Conflicting Virtues:** Virtue ethicists may grapple with conflicting virtues or moral considerations in abortion cases, such as the virtue of compassion for the pregnant person versus the virtue of respect for fetal life. They may seek to find a balance or harmony among these competing moral demands.

Overall, the utilitarian, deontological, and virtue ethics perspectives offer distinct ways of approaching the ethical complexities of abortion, each highlighting different moral principles, considerations, and values. Understanding these diverse perspectives can enrich ethical discourse and contribute to more nuanced and informed decision-making in abortion-related matters.

Contemporary Debates and Controversies on Abortion:

Personhood and the Status of the Fetus:

1. **Personhood Debate:** One of the central debates in the abortion discourse revolves around the question of when personhood begins. Some argue that personhood begins at conception, asserting that the fertilized egg or embryo is entitled to the same rights and protections as a born human being. Others contend that personhood emerges at a later stage of fetal development, such as viability or birth, and that the rights of the pregnant person should take precedence until then.

2. **Legal and Ethical Implications:** The question of fetal personhood has profound legal and ethical implications for abortion rights and restrictions. Laws and policies regarding abortion often hinge on definitions of personhood and the extent to which the state can intervene to protect fetal interests.

3. **Bioethical Considerations:** Bioethicists engage in ongoing discussions about the moral status of the fetus and the criteria for attributing personhood. These discussions encompass scientific, philosophical, and theological perspectives and inform public debates about abortion.

Women's Rights and Bodily Autonomy:

1. **Reproductive Rights:** Advocates for abortion rights emphasize the importance of women's autonomy and agency in making decisions about their own bodies and reproductive lives. They argue that restricting access to abortion infringes upon women's fundamental rights to privacy, liberty, and bodily integrity.

2. **Healthcare Access:** The availability of safe and legal abortion services is seen as essential for safeguarding women's health and well-being. Restrictions on abortion access,

such as mandatory waiting periods, gestational limits, and clinic closures, disproportionately affect marginalized communities and exacerbate existing health disparities.

3. Intersectional Analysis: Intersectional approaches to reproductive justice highlight the ways in which factors such as race, class, gender identity, and immigration status intersect to shape individuals' experiences of reproductive oppression and access to abortion care. Addressing these intersecting forms of inequality is central to advancing women's rights and bodily autonomy.

Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Abortion Decisions:

1. Financial Barriers: Economic considerations play a significant role in abortion decisions, with many individuals citing financial instability, lack of insurance coverage, and inability to afford childcare or support a family as reasons for seeking abortion.

2. Social Support: Access to social support networks, including family, friends, and community organizations, can influence abortion decisions. Individuals facing stigma, isolation, or lack of support may feel compelled to seek abortion as the most viable option given their circumstances.

3. Reproductive Justice Framework: Reproductive justice advocates highlight the interconnectedness of social, economic, and political factors in shaping individuals' reproductive choices. They emphasize the importance of addressing root causes of reproductive oppression, such as poverty, racism, and lack of access to healthcare, in order to ensure meaningful reproductive autonomy for all.

Overall, contemporary debates and controversies surrounding abortion are multifaceted, encompassing questions of ethics, law, public policy, healthcare access, and social justice. Understanding the complexities of these debates is essential for fostering informed dialogue and advancing reproductive rights and justice.

Ethical Decision Making and Resolutions on Abortion:

1. Deliberative Approaches: Ethical decision-making on abortion often involves deliberative processes that consider a range of moral principles, values, and perspectives. Deliberative approaches encourage open dialogue, respectful exchange of ideas, and careful consideration of evidence and arguments.

2. Principled Reasoning: Ethical decision-making frameworks for abortion may draw upon principles such as respect for autonomy, justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, and respect for persons. These principles provide a basis for evaluating the rights and interests of the pregnant person, the fetus, and other stakeholders.

3. Balancing Conflicting Values: Resolving ethical dilemmas in abortion cases requires balancing conflicting values and interests, such as the rights of the pregnant person versus the rights of the fetus, or individual autonomy versus societal interests. Ethicists and policymakers grapple with these tensions in efforts to develop morally defensible policies and practices.

4. Shared Decision Making: In clinical settings, shared decision-making models emphasize collaboration between healthcare providers and patients in making abortion-related decisions. This approach acknowledges the importance of patient autonomy, informed consent, and respect for patients' values and preferences.

5. Legal and Policy Considerations: Ethical decision-making on abortion is also shaped by legal and policy frameworks that govern abortion access, rights, and restrictions. Policymakers face the challenge of crafting laws and policies that balance competing interests and values while upholding constitutional rights and promoting public health.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, abortion remains a deeply contested ethical issue in contemporary society, encompassing debates about personhood, women's rights, socioeconomic factors, and healthcare access. Ethical decision-making on abortion requires careful consideration of diverse perspectives, moral principles, and empirical evidence. Resolving ethical dilemmas surrounding abortion necessitates balancing conflicting values and interests, engaging in deliberative dialogue, and striving for solutions that respect the autonomy, dignity, and well-being of all individuals involved. As society continues to grapple with the complexities of abortion, fostering open, respectful, and evidence-based discourse is essential for advancing reproductive rights, justice, and ethical healthcare practices.

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