

Virtue Theory and Abortion

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Traditional Approach

- “Is a fetus (or embryo) the type of thing that may or may not be justifiably or innocuously killed?”
 - I.e., is it a member of the moral community?
- Women’s rights
- Traditional approach, from the virtue ethics perspective is irrelevant to the issue.

Women's Rights

- The rights of women, while not denied, is irrelevant to the question of the morality of abortion.
 - Virtues transcend rights:
 - “Love and friendship do not survive their parties’ constantly insisting on their rights,…”
 - Virtue transcends rights in answering the question:
 - “In having an abortion in *these circumstances*, would the agent be acting virtuously or viciously or neither?” (emphasis added)

Fetal Status

- Is the fetus a member of the moral community?
 - “An important metaphysical question.”
 - Must be answered, *but*
 - Is only part of the issue.
 - Standard approach (those sympathetic towards Warren) use this line to conveniently dismiss the issue:
 - “But they have resulted in what should surely strike any nonphilosopher as a most bizarre aspect of nearly all the current philosophical literature on abortion, namely, that, far from treating abortion as a unique issue ...”
 - Moral status is not relevant question under virtue ethics.
 - Relevant question: Family life
 - “Pregnancy is unlike any other medical condition.”

Virtuous Attitude

- “To disregard this fact about it, to think of abortion as nothing but the killing of something that does not matter, or as *nothing but* the exercise of some right or rights one has, or as the *incidental means* to some desirable state of affairs, is to do something callous and light-minded, the sort of thing that no virtuous and wise person would do.” (emphasis added)

Embryology

- Stages of embryology (“fetal development”) is important and relevant to the seriousness of the issue.
 - “Abortion for shallow reasons in later stages is much more shocking than in earlier stages just as deep grief over a miscarriage in later stages is more appropriate than in earlier stages.” (paraphrased)

Eudaimonia

- Family life is an intrinsic part of human flourishing.
 - In having a child, in any capacity, need to consider what virtues one must have in order to be a good parent.
 - Must also consider how a woman “gets into the circumstances in the first place” as that may be a manifestation of a character flaw.
 - Reflection of one’s attitudes towards:
 - Sexual activity
 - Sexual partners
 - Contraception

Character Traits

- A virtuous parent has:

Parental Virtues	Cardinal Virtues
Strength	Prudence
Independence	Temperance
Resoluteness	Justice
Decisiveness	Fortitude
Self-confidence	
Responsibility	
Serious-mindedness	
Self-determination	

Case Study 1

- The Betts Family
 - Had a child with Harlequin Ichthyosis.
 - Dual haploid genetic disorder
 - Skin grows faster than body
 - Skin becomes thick, scaly, and hard
 - Constant infections
 - Massive fluid loss
 - Treatment requires daily scrubbing, de-scaling, and moisturizing
 - Life expectancy: days of birth
 - Betts' decided to have a second child.
 - Chances of another harlequin child, 25%
 - Consequence: second child with Harlequin's but also has cerebral palsy.



Case Study 2

- Pam Tebow (mother of Tim Tebow)
 - On a mission trip to the Phillipines when she contracted amoebic dysentery and went into a coma before becoming pregnant. She was given very serious drugs that can cause birth defects and still births.
 - Placental abruption fact sheet:
 - Potential effects on fetus/child:
 - 50% of abrupted children have birth weights low enough to risk long-term health damage
 - Perinatal mortality rate, 12%
 - Potential effects on woman:
 - Internal bleeding, hemorrhagic shock, kidney damage, embolisms, and heart failure
 - Maternal death rate—variable (general number 12%)
 - Sterility
 - Pam's age at time of pregnancy—37
 - Additional complications:
 - More difficult pregnancy without the abruption