

Brave Church/Hard Topics, 5/10/2023: Ethics of Abortion

This is the chat log of the discussion. Names and identifiable information have been removed for privacy.

References to slides for this session can be found in the *BC-HT Abortion Part I – 05-10-23.pdf* document linked [Brave Church-Hard Topics web page](#).

Additional information added after the discussion are identified with “NOTE:”

Part I: Ethics of Abortion (Slides 4-17)

Discussion Qs (slide 18):

IF the FUNCTIONS of consciousness, self-awareness, ability to communicate, autonomy and reason describe Adult Human Personhood... is there a difference between FUNCTIONING as a Human Person or BEING a Human Being?

How does this apply to a fetus---

***able to survive 3 months premature?**

***with heart activity (brainstem) but little cerebral cortex (12weeks)?**

Responses:

Is there going to be a discussion later about the concept of a soul? For some religions, it is when the soul inhabits the body that a person becomes a person. Varies w/ religions.

- Will talk about that next week. The references “Sacred Choices” addresses this (will have a link online)

Viability – to me that means medical intervention. Also means different cultures, medical environments are going to have different capabilities. Viability may be different across countries or even within the US.

- If the fetus is born early, it will go to NICU. The care after the mother and baby go home varies.
- If you listen to the rhetoric behind argument for no abortion, this is the core issue that people make their decisions on.

One of the core issues is whether the fetus is a human being and entitled to those rights. But I don't think it is the only issue.

One philosopher offered this: The Violinist story.

NOTE: This was in the original slide set but moved to the back.

- **Slides 33-34:** sketches out the moral issue. Written in 1971, before Roe v Wade.
- Idea is just because the person has a claim “right to life”, you don't get all things you need for your own existence. It does not guarantee the fetus's right to life.

The point of the thought exercise: The question of when a fetus becomes a person is not the only germane thing. The difference is that in many cases you have responsibility/culpability that the woman in the story doesn't have.

Does the fetus have rights, ignoring the woman's rights?

What do you think about a fetus with no cortex? No cognitive ability. What are their rights?

Struggle with this question often (scientifically minded). Don't normally take to the morality side of it. The violinist analogy is inherently flawed, not an accurate representation of the argument about this issue.

Whether the act was intentional or not, the being did not get a say in their position. It was created by cells from two different human being that went through an intentional act to create that grouping of cells.

The fertilization information was interesting. We have stem cells all over our bodies that could be used. Are those beings? Could other stem cells be beings?

Some of the arguments that are out there – what makes this conversation so hard – have holes, flaws in the arguments. We often have morality issues to it. That's why so many opposing abortions are so passionate about it.

The question of personhood extends beyond the fetus to the personhood of the mother. Some make the argument that the fetus' life is the most important aspect. Then the mother's life is downgraded to being an incubator and not a fully autonomous person able to make decisions about her body. Need to consider that in discussion.

We must have the conversation about the personhood of the mother as well.

We have in this country a large number of embryos frozen to deal with their infertility. Some of these embryos will not be used. What kind of laws should be made to address this issue?

An argument has been made to have unconscious people with uteruses to be incubators for those embryos. There is an ethical issue of how many embryos should be implanted.

Current laws have been passed that place the value of the fetus above that of the life of the person who is carrying said fetus.

Part II: Rights and Moral Obligations (Slides 19-29)

Discussion Qs (slide 30):

Are there any situations when the fetus has a RIGHT to the woman's Body?

Is there a difference between KILLING the fetus and ALLOWING DEATH when the fetus is detached during an abortion?

Does the woman lose the Right to control her Body if she has unprotected Sex?

If the pregnancy is causing extreme harm to the woman or risk of death, should that change the relative Rights between fetus and woman?

Responses:

I saw a bumper sticker that said,
"AA DD CC"

Avoid the Abortion Dilemma.

Decide on Conception before Copulation

I heard a law student in Idaho explaining his pro-life position: believe that even an egg is a person created by God. The woman can go through a lot, but an abortion is a killing against moral issues. No argument about facts will change that. Insoluble issues.

Half of all pregnancies are unplanned and this is true 68 or so years after the development of the oral contraceptive and all the newer contraceptives developed and available to couples subsequent to the availability of the birth control pill...4 or so different IUDs, the arm implant, the Depo Provera shot, the ring, the patch and more. All these methods and the rate of unplanned pregnancies is unchanged.

Tend toward the initial presentation of trimesters. Know it is messy. Somewhere between 1st trimester and later on, have something that would meet the definition of life. Have to pull back to 1st part on the trimesters. Once you reach the third trimester, there is a balancing act.

You cannot have an abortion in the third trimester in most countries.

Historically this line has to do with quickening, or when a woman perceives fetal movement. This is around 19 weeks gestation for a first pregnancy and a bit earlier for a subsequent pregnancy. Some of the analogies [Slide 29] mean a lack of consent which is triggering for those involved in sexual abuse. They were potentially triggering for people who may have been victims of sexual assault/abuse. That is part of this discussion as well. People making decisions on the laws seem to be saying women don't have full autonomy, whatever is done to them is acceptable. Disregarding that is ignoring that issue. Having a hard time with the discussion. Trying to do a simple binary and it's not. Left this church because of PCUSA stand on the abortion issue – we go back to Psalm 139 and believe that life begins at conception. If you can't put a finger on when life begins, not sure how to make that judgment.

- The Biblical issue will be covered next week.

One thing we have overlooked: in most cases in this country with abortion at the present time, it is a third party making the decisions and not the direct people involved. The parents, doctors, or even pastors are not involved.

What happens when the pregnancy becomes life threatening to the woman? What about a partial miscarriage? What about a failed pregnancy or cases where the pregnancy is so unhealthy that the child will die upon birth. Each situation is different and the woman may be facing factors psychological and emotionally that we may not be aware of. Each abortion is a tragedy but some are more tragic.

Decision should be one that the woman could live with. She'll have to live with that decision for the rest of her life.

It is important that women not be pressured.

Next week:

- Brief history of abortion
- Religious perspectives, including PCUSA