

# Applied Ethics and its Controversies Regarding Abortion—Its Right to Life on Human Embryos and Fetuses

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*Abstract— 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. Much of the public debate on abortion arises whether it is morally right or wrong and what is killed in an abortion? These questions are never ending where we shall approach the issue that demonstrates that what is killed in abortion is a human embryo- a human being. Further it also clarifies that the cell is growing in its own distinct direction with whole organism. Thus, the present paper focuses three major points. Firstly, it discusses about applied ethics. Secondly, the problems of bio-ethical issues like abortion have been taken in discussion and Right to life on human embryos and fetuses. Thirdly, Gita's view on abortion is given.*

**Keywords-** Applied-ethics, morality, bio-ethical, abortion, embryo, fetuses.

## I. INTRODUCTION: APPLIED ETHICS

According to Mahatma Gandhi “Ethics shape character and character shapes man”. A man without character is a man with flesh and bones and nothing more than that.”

Ethics deals with values relating to human conduct where rightness and wrongness is concerned. In the age of globalization all human beings try to attain material comfort or happiness due to modernization and rapid development in technology, but it seems that they feel insecure in every sphere of life. As a result they are unable to lead a meaningful life and to preserve social harmony and integration, morality and moral codes are very essential. The most relevant ethical issues like abortion, euthanasia are relevant in our lives. These issues are controversial in our society as they are facts in dispute.

Applied ethics reflects moral dilemmas and moral problems in different social contexts. The term ‘applied ethics’ and ‘practical ethics’ are interchangeable to indicate the application of ethics to certain areas of human activity<sup>1</sup> (Childress 1986).

Thus, applied ethics deals with ethical problems in different areas of society. 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, they also characterize ethics in general. It gives importance to specific issues and controversies in private and public life. In the private sphere ethical issues can include matters relating to the family and in the public sphere applied ethics may involve assessing policy in the light of the impact

of advances in biomedical and genetics example, life and death, Risk Technology and ethics or it could mean duties to future generations in the light of environmental problems.

## II. BIO-ETHICS

The term “Bio- ethics” is the combination of “bio” representing biological knowledge and “ethics” which refers to knowledge of human value systems. The term “Bio-ethics” used for the first time by Van Ransselaer Potter of Winsconsin University in 1970 in his book “Bio- ethics a Bridge to Future”.

The issues of medical ethics come within the domain of bio- ethics. Although ethical.

Issues have been raised in medical and biology since ancient times. Introduction of biomedical and other technologies in second half of the 20th century has intensified old problems and added new ones such as issue over the definition of death and withdraw 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, and organ Transplantation, cloning etc.

Thus solving bio- ethical issues is a complex one.

## III. ABORTION

Abortion 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?’

‘If permissible then under what conditions it is said to be right?’ “whether fetus can be regarded as a person or not?”

Thus going through these questions on issues on abortion we are able to get a better 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.

Third premise: Therefore, it is wrong to kill a human fetus. 2( Peter Singer, 2011).

In this argument it shows that as the fetus is an innocent human being so it is wrong to kill a human fetus. But, the question arises that whether ‘fetus can be termed as a person?’ Many of those who defend abortion try to establish the point that fetus not a person, but only a bit of tissue that will become a person at birth. In early pregnancy the event may termed as natural miscarriage. But they are not distressing in the same way as the death of a person. A parent who loses a child faces one of the worst experiences with hopes and dreams. But a prospective mother who suffers early miscarriage does not have someone to mourn and suffer for her own lost hopes and plans. For this reason, although she may deserve sympathy, she is not in the same category as the mother who loses a child. ‘Rule utilitarianism’ believes that people should follow the standards which have been set by society, as the decision should not be bound by individual welfare but by societal welfare. Hence, too, even cultures that forbid abortion do not insist on a full burial service for a dead fetus. So, a newly fertilized ovum, a newly implanted clump of cells, is no more a person than an acorn is an oak tree without itself being an oak tree. 3(Steven Cahn, 2009).

Again, if we see through Bentham’s version of utilitarianism, known as ‘act utilitarianism’ it reflects as the most adequate theory because it looks at the consequences of an abortion, taking each situation into separate account of all others. It prefers to judge each individual care 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.

According to Dworkin, a fetus has no interest before third trimester. Fetus has no feelings of pain as the brain is not sufficiently developed. The fetal brain will developed to feel

pain from the twenty sixth weeks. So, something that is not alive does not have interests but after the third trimester once the fetus can live on its own it may have interests.

#### **IV. FETAL LIFE AND ITS RIGHT: BHAGAVAT GITA**

Sattva, Rajas, Tamas --- composition of the material world and these qualities are present in our mind as well where 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 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.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Since utilitarianism is based on the empirical evidence that supports the widespread happiness of many, it’s important to include the medical and health benefits of abortion as it spreads happiness amongst a great number of the populace. Many women who experience unwanted childbearing affects the entire family. Mothers with unwanted births suffer from higher levels of depression and lower level of happiness than mothers without unwanted births. So it can be seen as

ethically wrong from the utilitarian outlook where we see many situation that spread depression Therefore, Utilitarian's believe that under certain circumstances an abortion could be justified.

Respect for 'individual dignity' and 'life' these two basic points are involved with abortion where balance is needed for smooth running of the society. Thus, in the system of human rights, there is often a need to balance right against each other.

There will always be great debate whether or not abortion is right or wrong or moral. Everyone will have their own opinions and justification for why they feel abortion should be legal or illegal, moral or immoral. Thus, Utilitarianism aims to have the greatest amount of happiness and least amount of pain, at the highest quality for the greatest of people. The utilitarian consequential principle of ethics seeks to set a general rule for which to be applied to all moral decisions. In the case of abortions, the utilitarian states that all unwanted pregnancies and pregnancies that represent a physical, mental, emotional and financial hardship should be terminated via abortion.

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 as it destroys human being. Many think that abortion is wrong as right to life overrides the right to control one's own body. 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.

**Notes:**

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