

Position on the Morality and Legality of Abortion

What is the cost of humanity? Cost can be defined in a few different ways: “the amount or equivalent paid or charged for something; the outlay or expenditure (as of effort or sacrifice) made to achieve an object; loss or penalty incurred especially in gaining something.” In each of these definitions, there is a situation of give and take, an exchange, a loss of something to gain something else. The world is quite familiar with cost. Between the exchange of tangibles for intangibles and vice versa, people are well-read when it comes to this idea. The normalcy of cost, however, keeps it from being noticed or fully appreciated in certain situations. The normalcy of cost also distracts from the full extent of its impact. It is often justified in circumstances based on who is doing the gaining. It is often condemned in circumstances based on who is on the losing end. The debate on abortion seems to fit this mold. Who is going to incur the cost of abortion? The pro-life side would argue the unborn child. Who is going to incur the cost of not having abortion? The pro-choice side would argue the mother. My belief is the first question is the only that needs to be asked because it is humanity itself that incurs the cost of abortion.

I do not personally know a woman who has had an abortion or even who has been faced with the choice of abortion, at least not that she has shared about. Reading so many stories of unique situations women are in when faced with the decision has opened my mind much more about the manifold factors that come into play. This cannot be overlooked, especially by the pro-life side. Each side of the debate has multiple traps they can fall into, and this is one for the pro-life side. Claiming to protect the value of life as a whole does not jive with dismissing the agonizingly difficult situations women find themselves in when facing abortion. This does not apply to every case of course, as there are plenty of ordinary abortions as well. For the pro-choice side, devaluing the human embodiment of a developing fetus and avoiding the morality of

aborting a potential life are the traps they may find themselves in. The heart of either side should not be an intent to create an antagonist and a protagonist in the story, whether that be the woman as the good guy and the fetus as the bad guy or the woman as the bad guy and the fetus as the good guy. I do not believe that is what either side desires. We are all humans, and even though we disagree, we share that common experience of living and breathing. In this way then, the abortion debate should be first understood through that lens and that is the lens I hope to stick to as the morality and legality of abortion is discussed and a stance taken in this discussion.

Let us be clear on the definition of terms that will be used so confusion that can be avoided, will be. The Merriam Webster dictionary will be used for all of the following. Morality is defined as “a doctrine or system of moral (of or relating to principles of right and wrong in behavior) conduct; conformity to ideals of right human conduct.” Right is defined as “qualities (such as adherence to duty of obedience to lawful authority) that together constitute the ideal of moral propriety or merit moral approval; something to which one has a just claim; something that one may properly claim as due; the cause of truth or justice.” Lastly, freedom is defined as “the quality or state of being free: such as the absence of necessity, coercion, or constraint in choice or action; liberation from slavery or restraint or from the power of another; the quality or state of being exempt or released from something onerous; unrestricted use; improper familiarity; boldness of conception or execution.”

With regards to the morality of abortion, it is important to consider the relationship between morality and right, morality and freedom, and right and freedom. Just by looking at the definitions of morality and right, there is a clear tie between the two. Right in the sense of behavior and virtue and right in the sense of a just claim to something are related by the unique status of human beings as capable thinkers and doers. Interestingly enough, right and morality

operate most closely to their full forms in the space of freedom. If people were robots, or puppets even, this discussion would not make sense because behavior couldn't be deemed as right or wrong and the just claim to anything wouldn't be necessary. However, the question can be asked how right and morality operate in a space of lesser or greater freedom. For example, thinking about freedom in terms of "the absence of constraint in choice or action," the abundance or lack of money can increase or decrease certain freedoms, such as the choice to eat whatever you want whenever you want or to travel wherever you want whenever you want.

If a little boy is growing up in a single-mom household with a tight budget and is always hungry, there are certain restrictions of freedom present there because of the factors of the situation. Thus, morality and right may not be able to operate as they should in an ideal reality. Of course, he has a just claim to food. His body needs it, but lack of money is preventing him from totally fulfilling this need. It's not really up to him to choose not to be hungry. However, he does have a choice of how to act in response to his hunger. His behavior is colored by this unfulfilled need and the "ideals of right human conduct" can easily take a backseat. Thus, the little boy, in this space of limited freedom, does not operate out of morality but out of his unfulfilled need, his just claim that is not met. So how can he be punished when he steals something to eat from the grocery store only to fill his just claim to food? Enter legality. Society has set up a civil structure in which stealing is wrong and punishable. Thus, the crossroads of right and morality is presented. The hang-up is not that the little boy acted on his just claim to food but rather how or in what way he acted on it. It would be misguided and void of empathy to label him a thief but the fact of the theft remains. He committed a wrong in which there are consequences and not even his dire situation or his right to food can exempt him from these consequences. How then does this all apply to the woman facing the choice of abortion?

In the situation of a woman facing the choice of abortion, there is some perceived or actual restriction of freedom, whether it is the single mother from a poor economic background or a married middle-class working woman. In the case of the single mother, the restriction probably comes from lack of resources. In the case of the married woman, the perceived restriction probably comes by the way of career or maybe personal ambitions. Both cases then present a sense of limited freedoms. The space of limited freedom, as reflected by the example of the little boy, puts tension on the relationship of right and morality. The women have a just claim to their body. As with the little boy, just claims are related to necessities of life and well-being with a clear distinction between need and desire. Thus, life and well-being entail need of the body. However, this need is unique because a developing child also needs a woman's body, so it would seem that the just claim to a woman's body is shared by herself and the developing child. How is this need fulfilled by either the woman or the developing child if it is shared? If the woman aborts the developing child, the child is denied its need and stripped of its just claim. If the woman does not abort the developing child, possibly gaining additional burdens and troubles along the line for both mother and child, there is still fulfillment of both needs and just claims.

Furthermore, say the developing child does not have a just claim to the mother's body because it has not achieved a status in which a just claim to anything at all makes sense. The mother then decides to fulfill her need for her body by aborting the developing child. Is there any wrong involved in this way of fulfilling her just claim to her body or well-being? Whether deemed a mass of cells or a potential human being, the fact remains that something exists inside a woman's womb. This existence depends on the environment and nutrients provided by the mother's body. Thus, regardless of status or stage of development, every single human existing today had at one time a just claim to the body of his or her mother because that is a biologically

designed need of humanity. Let legality enter in at this point. Society has set up a civil structure in which taking life is wrong and punishable. With the life inside the womb having a just claim to the body of the woman just as the woman does based on need, the exception of self-defense does not quite make sense. In my fragmented and incomplete opinion then, the consequences for taking a life apply to the women in both situations if they decide on abortion. Is this a harsh reality? Unfortunately, so. A harsh reality existed for the little boy as well and like him, the women who do choose abortion in dire circumstances or even normal circumstances ought not to be labeled as heartless and cold individuals. This is quite misguided because again, the perceived or actual restrictions of freedom put rights and morality at a crossroad and muddies the waters, not excluding people in these situations from the consequences but rather requiring a recognition of the place in which they are operating out of.

The existence of harsh realities is a cost of humanity. There isn't really any way to avoid harsh realities in life because they naturally occur in the interactions of people with people and people with their environment. As mentioned above, humans are given an incredible capacity to think and act, along with intense desires and pleasures. Carrying out these things often causes friction with the attempts of others to do the same. Being a human comes with exceptional responsibility because within our power comes the ability to wound and to help heal. Wounds are a cost of humanity but so are joys and hopes and dreams. In a beautiful exchange, we give parts of ourselves to incur joys and hopes and dreams. Even in the harsh realities then, there is ever-present hope. I think we are often afraid of hope, afraid that if we do hope, we will be let down. However, it seems that true hope cannot let one down because it operates outside of the results or outcomes that are the objects of our hope. This is a key distinction, there is hope and then there is what is hoped for. Often, when hope abides in one's life, it becomes less about what is hoped for

and more about the lens of hope through which life is perceived. In this way, hope is separated from the fear of being taken a fool because it is not reliant on the outcome of the circumstances. Even in the most dire circumstances, hope exists because the reality that things can turn out better than what we expect exists. What does abortion cost humanity? Hope.

At first thought, this may seem incredibly unfair and quite a stretch. Or maybe it may seem as hardly a big deal, after all, is it not possible to live well without hope? This is a whole other beast to consider so let us stick with the first critique. In the vast, yet small world humanity inhabits, abortion is not the only thing that costs hope. I would argue that the death penalty and any situation we as people find ourselves in where we act as the sole judge and decider of possible outcomes robs humanity, as a whole, of hope. There is so much outside of our control; I think we have all experienced the lack of comfort and uncertainty that comes with the uncontrollable. Thus, it makes sense that we desire to consider that the only possible outcomes of a situation are in the realm of our knowledge. I think we would all agree that avoiding harsh realities is something we would do if we could. The truth is though, we cannot; the occurrence is out of our hands. In this way then, there also exists the potential of outcomes much better than those we consider because they too are out of our hands. What can we do then? Take good care of our choices, attitudes, and responses. It is often said in the realm of sport to focus on the things that can be controlled because the favorable result does not always go to the most talented or even deserving team or player. When faced with dire circumstances, let the crazy hope remain that things will turn out better than imagined.

Accepting that abortion can be morally right and legally acceptable and necessary, chisels at the unique sense of hope that exists in humanity. For the woman raped and pregnant at an age where she has few people around her to support her and fewer resources to even think about

raising a child, there is hope. For the woman happily married with a loving husband who gets pregnant at the peak of her career, there is hope. It is by no means easy to choose hope in either of these situations out of the many that face women considering abortion, so why allow for the possibility of so much pain and burden for the sake of hope? Because it is not so much about the outcome as the outlook. Outcomes often have a time frame, whereas an outlook is enduring and contagious. Having an outlook of hope is worth protecting and fostering because it will reap benefits long after hardships and harsh realities pass.

After all such thought and discussion, my position remains that abortion is morally wrong and can rightly have legal consequences. I am not sure that I can speak on the severity of the legal consequences. The fitting of offense to punishment is not relevant at this point necessarily. The choice of a woman to have an abortion is immensely personal. However, it is immensely communal as well. It is automatically communal because it involves another being. One could even argue two other beings, the man and the life in the womb. This then gives abortion the opportunity for legal intervention. The crossroads of morality and right have been considered and right conduct fosters the qualities in humanity that are fruitful as a whole. Abortion costs humanity the fullness and possibility of fruitful hope.

Works Cited

1. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>