Abortion: is it morally permissible?

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Abortion: is it morally permissible?

- Defining abortion
- Why it matters
- The basic pro-life argument
- Exceptions?
- The two best pro-choice arguments
- Bad pro-choice arguments
- Suggestions
What is “abortion”?

Suggested definition #1: “Abortion is prematurely ending a pregnancy”

Examples:

• “A medical abortion is one that is brought about by taking medications that will end a pregnancy. The alternative is surgical abortion, which ends a pregnancy by emptying the uterus (or womb) with special instruments.” – prochoice.org/

• “What is an abortion? Abortion is a medical procedure that ends a pregnancy.” - www.plannedparenthood.org/

• “What is abortion? An abortion is the deliberate medical process of ending a pregnancy.” – www.mariestopes.org.uk/

• “Abortion is the early ending of a pregnancy.” – WebMD
What is “abortion”?  
**Suggested definition #1**: “Abortion is prematurely ending a pregnancy”

Problems:
- **Medically induced labor** prematurely ends a pregnancy through medication.
- **A scheduled C-section** prematurely ends a pregnancy through surgery.
- When a **baby is born alive** after an attempted abortion, it is often referred to as a ‘failed attempt at induced abortion.’

This definition is confusing and problematic.
What is “abortion”?

**Suggested definition #2:** “Abortion is the intentional killing of the unborn.”

Examples:

- “the termination of a pregnancy after, accompanied by, resulting in, or closely followed by the death of the embryo or fetus” – Merriam-Webster
- “Induced termination of pregnancy, involving destruction of the embryo or fetus.” – American Heritage Science Dictionary
- “Abortion is when a pregnancy is ended so that it doesn't result in the birth of a child.” – www.bpas.org/ (pro-choice org)
What is “abortion”?

**Suggested definition #2**: “Abortion is the intentional killing of the unborn.”

Objection: The unborn is not alive.

Response:

- “the condition that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic matter, including the capacity for growth, reproduction, functional activity, and continual change preceding death” – dictionary.com

- “Female Germ Cell Aneuploidy and Embryo Death in Mice Lacking the Meiosis-Specific Protein SCP3” - *Science* 10 May 2002.

- Etc...
What is “abortion”?

**Suggested definition #2:** “Abortion is the intentional killing of the unborn.”

Objection: Abortion is not ‘killing.’

Response:

- “to deprive of life: cause the death of” – Merriam-Webster
- “to deprive of life in any manner; cause the death of; slay.” – dictionary.com
- Killing can be morally permissible. It is morally permissible to kill a plant. Most people think it is permissible to kill animals or to kill a human being in self-defense.
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U.S. abortions

The annual number of legal abortions increased through the 1970s, leveled off in the 1980s, fell in the 1990s and is now stable.

Number of abortions (in 000s)

1970: Abortion laws liberalized in 15 states
Roe v. Wade, Jan 22, 1973

26% of all pregnancies
18% of all pregnancies

Abortion worldwide

TOTAL DEATHS 2005
58 million

Communicable diseases, maternal and perinatal conditions, and nutritional deficiencies 30%
Cardiovascular diseases 30%
Injuries 9%
Other chronic diseases 9%
Diabetes 2%
Chronic respiratory diseases 7%
Cancer 13%

ABORTION
11 million

https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/induced-abortion-worldwide
Sex-selective abortion

Manfield C¹, Hooper S, Marteau TM.

Abstract
The aims of this systematic literature review are to estimate termination rates after prenatal diagnosis of one of five conditions: Down syndrome, spina bifida, anencephaly, and Turner and Klinefelter syndromes, and to determine the extent to which rates vary across conditions and with year of publication. Papers were included if they reported (i) numbers of prenatally diagnosed conditions that were terminated, (ii) at least five cases diagnosed with one of the five specified conditions, and (iii) were published between 1980 and 1998. 20 papers were found which met the inclusion criteria. Termination rates varied across conditions. They were highest following a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome (92 per cent; CI: 91 per cent to 93 per cent) and lowest following diagnosis of Klinefelter syndrome (58 per cent; CI: 50 per cent to 66 per cent). Where comparisons could be made, termination rates were similar in the 1990s to those reported in the 1980s.
Race and abortion

Specifically non-Hispanic Blacks have a 59.8% abortion rate.
Development of the unborn

4 weeks
Your ball of cells is now officially an embryo. You're now about 4 weeks from the beginning of your last period. It's around this time — when your next period would normally be due — that you might be able to get a positive result on a home pregnancy test.

Your baby is the size of a poppy seed.
Development of the unborn

5 weeks

Your baby resembles a tadpole more than a human, but is growing fast. The circulatory system is beginning to form, and the tiny heart will start to beat this week.

Your baby is the size of a sesame seed.

www.babycenter.com/fetal-development-week-by-week
Development of the unborn

www.babycenter.com/fetal-development-week-by-week
Development of the unborn

13 weeks

This is the last week of your first trimester. Your baby’s tiny fingers now have fingerprints, and her veins and organs are clearly visible through her skin. If you’re having a girl, her ovaries contain more than 2 million eggs.

Your baby is the size of a pea pod.

www.babycenter.com/fetal-development-week-by-week
Development of the unborn
Development of the unborn

© www.ehd.org
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Discussing abortion

• Reason, logic, arguments
• Emotional consequences
• Political consequences
• Social consequences
The basic argument

Definition: Abortion is the intentional killing of the unborn

P1. It is morally wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being

P2. The unborn is an innocent human being

Therefore,

C. Abortion is morally wrong
P1. Is it morally wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being?

• Moral bedrock (size, sex, race, intelligence, nationality, etc...)

• Differences are not relevant to moral worth:
  • Size
  • Level of development
  • Environment
  • Dependency

• Historical precedent
P2. Is the unborn a human being?

- “human being - any individual of the genus Homo, especially a member of the species Homo sapiens.” – dictionary.com

- “[The] fertilized ovum, known as a zygote, is a large diploid cell that is the beginning, or primordium, of a human being.” - Moore, K. L. Essentials of Human Embryology. Toronto: B.C. Decker Inc, 1988, p.2

- “Embryo: An organism in the earliest stage of development; in a man, from the time of conception to the end of the second month in the uterus.”
The basic argument

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Life of the mother

• Death of baby is foreseen, not intended
• Choice between one death or two deaths
• Trolley problem
Rape and incest

• Morality, not legality
• Value of unborn does not depend on circumstances of conception
• ~1% of abortions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was a victim of rape</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Became pregnant as a result of incest</td>
<td>&lt;0.5</td>
<td>&lt;0.5</td>
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*Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 2005, 37(3):110–118*

• Real agreement or bluff?
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Denying P1: Not all the unborn have a right to life

• Mental function as basis for right to life:
  • “Human babies are not born self-aware, or capable of grasping that they exist over time. They are not persons.” – Princeton philosopher Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*
  • “The fetus acquires the moral standing that you and I have when it first begins to have conscious desires.” – CU philosopher David Boonin, *A Defense of Abortion*

• Awareness of pain as basis for right to life
• Viability as basis for right to life
Denying P1: Not all the unborn have a right to life

Viability and its implications:
• Geography and right to life
• Technology and right to life
• Disability and right to life
Denying P1: Not all the unborn have a right to life

Awareness of pain and its implications:

• Comatose adults
• Anesthetized adults
• Congenital insensitivity to pain
Denying P1: Not all the unborn have a right to life

Mental function and implications:

• Mentally disabled adults
• Comatose adults
• Elderly adults
• Premature infants in the future
• Newborns: “the life of a newborn is of less value than the life of a pig, a dog, or a chimpanzee.” - Princeton bioethics professor Peter Singer in *Practical Ethics*
Denying P1: Bodily autonomy is more important than the life of the unborn

Bodily autonomy and implications:

• Bodily autonomy of both men and women is normally heavily restricted
• Absolute bodily autonomy would justify practices currently accepted as highly immoral
• Most abortion is active, not passive
• Absolute bodily autonomy would justify the killing of babies in the birth canal
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“My body, my choice”
“Clump of cells”

It’s just the way of conservatives acting like a fetus, which is a **clump** of cells with no idea of its existence, is the same thing as a woman. Whether that be a...
“Keep your rosaries off my ovaries”
“Don’t like abortion? Don’t have one?”
“No uterus, no opinion”
“Skin/sperm/egg cells are human”
“Pro-lifers are bad”
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How to talk about abortion

• Always return to the two central questions:
  • “What is the unborn?”
  • “Can we kill it?”
• Morality, not politics
• Be gracious
• Ask questions
• Share the gospel