***Highlight key ideas that either reflect your viewpoint or help you understand the topic better in the article as you read through. Be sure to highlight at least THREE points per section.***

The Most Important Question About Abortion

Dennis Prager

Let’s talk about one of the most emotionally charged subjects there is -- abortion -- but in an unemotional way. Also, let’s not touch on the question that most preoccupies discussion of the subject -- whether abortion should be legal or illegal. The only question here is the moral one: Is ending the life of a human fetus – moral?

Let’s begin with this question: Does the human fetus have any value and any rights? Now, it’s a scientific fact that a human fetus is human life. Those who argue that the human fetus has no rights say that a fetus is not a person. But even if you believe that, it doesn’t mean the fetus has no intrinsic value or no rights. There are many living beings that are not persons that have both value and rights: Dogs and other animals, for example. And that’s **Moral Argument Number One**: A living being doesn’t have to be a person in order to have intrinsic moral value and rights.

When challenged with this argument, people usually change the subject to the rights of the mother -- meaning the right of a mother to end her fetus’s life under any circumstance, for any reason, and at any time in her pregnancy. Is that moral? It is only if we believe that the human fetus has no intrinsic worth. But in most cases, nearly everyone believes that the human fetus has essentially infinite worth and an almost absolute right to live. When? When a pregnant woman wants to give birth. Then, society – and its laws – regard the fetus as so valuable that if someone were to kill that fetus, that person could be prosecuted for homicide. Only if a pregnant woman doesn’t want to give birth, do many people regard the fetus as worthless. Now, does that make sense?

It doesn’t seem to. Either a human fetus has worth or it doesn’t. And this is **Moral Argument Number Two**: On what moral grounds does the mother alone decide a fetus’s worth? We certainly don’t do that with regard to a newborn child. It is society, not the mother – or the father -- that determines whether a newborn child has worth and a right to live.

So, the question is: Why should that be different before the human being is born? Why does one person, a mother, get to determine whether that being has any right to live? People respond by saying that a woman has the right to “control her body.” Now, that is entirely correct. The problem here, however, is that the fetus is not “her body;” it is in her body. It is a separate body. And that’s **Moral Argument Number Three**. No one ever asks a pregnant woman, “How’s your body?” when asking about the fetus. People ask, “How’s the baby?”

**Moral Argument Number Four**: Virtually everyone agrees that the moment the baby comes out of the womb, killing the baby is murder. But deliberately killing it a few months before birth is considered no more morally problematic than extracting a tooth. How does that make sense?

And finally, **Moral Argument Number Five**: Aren’t there instances in which just about everyone – even among those who are pro-choice – would acknowledge that an abortion might not be moral? For example, would it be moral to abort a female fetus solely because the mother prefers boys to girls – as has happened millions of times in China and elsewhere? And one more example: Let’s say science develops a method of determining whether a child in the womb is gay or straight. Would it be moral to kill a gay fetus because the mother didn’t want a gay child?

People may offer practical reasons not to criminalize all abortions. People may differ about when personhood begins; and about the morality of abortion after rape or incest. But with regard to the vast majority of abortions – those of healthy women aborting a healthy fetus – let’s be clear. Most of these abortions just aren’t moral.

Good societies can survive people doing immoral things. But a good society cannot survive if it calls immoral things moral.

I’m Dennis Prager.

Quotes from Abortion Advocates

“Right to Choose, Reproductive Rights, or Reproductive Freedom.”

Abortion is first and foremost a matter of female autonomy. These thinkers say that, without abortion, women cannot control their bodies and their reproductive choices. Even if the unborn child is a human being and a moral person, that doesn’t give him a right to trespass in a woman’s body. Women have authority over their own bodies and need the right to abortion in order to be free and equal.

The State’s failure to guarantee the equal exercise of reproductive rights violates women’s rights to life, health, physical, mental and moral integrity, autonomy, intimacy, dignity and the right to freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

A first step towards gender equality is to ensure that women are in control of their reproductive capacity, including having access to contraception and safe abortion, because the sovereignty of women over their own bodies is key to achieving gender equality.

Unsafe abortion is one of the principal factors affecting women’s health in developing regions. Estimates from 2012 indicate that 6.9 million women (or 6.9 per 1000) between ages 15 and 44 underwent care for complications related to unsafe abortions.

“Having a baby would dramatically change my life" and "I can't afford a baby now"

***Interference with school or career, and unreadiness for a child or another child.***

Nulliparity (a woman who has not had a child previously)) was the most important correlate of reporting interference with education or work as a reason for choosing abortion, after other variables were controlled for. Women who had children were less likely than women with no children to give these reasons. In addition, women aged 30 and older were much less likely than those aged 17 and younger to cite educational or career interference.

Higher proportions of women who were unmarried or cohabiting, nonwhite, poorer and unemployed said they could not afford to have a child now, compared with their respective counterparts. This reason was also more commonly given by young teenagers and women aged 20–24.

Women could not afford to have a child now, and large proportions mentioned responsibilities to children, partner issues and unreadiness to parent.

Most women in every age, parity, relationship, racial, income and education category cited concern for or responsibility to other individuals as a factor in their decision to have an abortion. In contrast to the perception (voiced by politicians and laypeople across the ideological spectrum) that women who choose abortion for reasons other than rape, incest and life endangerment do so for "convenience," our data suggest that after carefully assessing their individual situations, women base their decisions largely on their ability to maintain economic stability and to care for the children they already have.

Flaws in Pro-Choice Arguments

The bodily autonomy argument for abortion could only get off the ground if abortion entailed unintentional killing. But — in the case of abortion — the intended outcome is a dead child.

The pregnancy itself was the result of a violation of bodily integrity. The vast majority of which result from consensual sex. In fact, the pro-abortion Guttmacher Institute’s research has shown that only 1 percent of abortions are obtained in cases of rape — a percentage that holds steady across decades of data.

In consensual sex, even in the case of failed contraception, the man and woman voluntarily engage in the act that brings a new life into existence. The unborn child is not an intruder who uses force and violence to attach himself to the mother, the way a parasite attaches to a host. Rather, the unborn child is right where he is supposed to be, doing what he’s supposed to be doing. Conception is the natural fruit of sex, and a child developing in the womb is a sign of reproductive health. Conception and gestation are natural results of sex. People—parents especially—bear responsibilities for the natural consequences of their acts. A man and a woman who voluntarily engage in the act that can create new life, a life that comes into existence in the condition of radical dependence, owe duties in justice to care for that new life. This is the heart of parental obligation.

Pregnancy for many women can be a burden, and for some it can entail grave physical costs, but that doesn’t justify the intentional killing of another innocent person—and not just any innocent person, but the woman’s child. Missing from bodily autonomy arguments for abortion is any recognition that a moral relationship between mother and child already exists by the time a woman is contemplating an abortion. Both mother and father have natural duties to protect and care for their children, regardless of whether they are “wanted” or “unwanted,” “planned” or a “surprise,” “perfect” or “defective.”

A new human being comes into existence at conception, human beings possess intrinsic dignity and worth, and government exists to protect innocent human beings from lethal violence—explain the long moral and legal tradition against murder. Examining the bodily autonomy argument for abortion highlights another pro-life point: abortion is wrong not only because strangers shouldn’t kill each other, but also and especially because parents have special obligations to their children, and it isn’t governmental overreach to require parents to fulfill those obligations. The unborn child in the womb isn’t an intruder or parasite. He is exactly where he is supposed to be, doing exactly what he’s supposed to be doing, and his parents are supposed to be nurturing, protecting, and loving him. Though some parents cannot care for their child after birth, they have a responsibility at least to bring their child into the world and find someone who can care for him. Carrying a baby to term and placing him for adoption is one way in which parents can fulfill their obligations to a child for whom they are unable to care after birth.

ARTICLE SUMMARY

Give THREE points that most strongly convey your opinion regarding abortion.

Give TWO points that you did not previously know or understand regarding abortion.

Give any additional comments or ask questions: