**CC0003 / Ethics and Civics in a Multicultural World**

**Sem 1 AY21-22**

**Case Study for Week 05: Might a Virtuous Person Have an Abortion?**

**Case Background:**

**Abortion** (more precisely: ***induced* abortion**), is the intentional termination of a pregnancy which results in the death of a zygote, embryo, or fetus (Shafer-Landau 2019: 167).

There is a consensus among medical researchers that a fetus can survive outside of the mother’s womb 20 weeks after conception. However, most fetuses born this early will die, and most who survive will have severe impairments ([Lee 2015](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/05/26/setting-the-record-straight-on-measuring-fetal-age-and-the-20-week-abortion/)).

There is also a scientific consensus that fetuses are incapable of experiencing pain until 24-25 weeks after conception ([Koch 2009](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/when-does-consciousness-arise/) ; [Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists 2010](https://www.rcog.org.uk/globalassets/documents/guidelines/rcogfetalawarenesswpr0610.pdf)).

Abortion is legal in many countries ([Mackintosh 2017](http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/25/health/abortion-laws-around-the-world/index.html)). Different countries impose different conditions under which abortions are legally allowed. In quite a few countries, abortions are allowed by law when the mother’s life is not threatened by the pregnancy. In Singapore, the law permits a pregnant woman to have an abortion in the first or second trimester (but not the third) just because she prefers not to have a child at the time ([AWARE 2021](https://www.aware.org.sg/information/abortion/)).

Medically supervised abortions are safe. They are even safer than childbirth. According to one study from the United States, only one woman in 167,000 dies from abortions conducted under medical care. Also, “women were about 14 times more likely to die during or after giving birth to a live baby than to die from complications of an abortion” ([Pittman 2012](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-abortion/abortion-safer-than-giving-birth-study-idUSTRE80M2BS20120123)).

Studies have found no common long-term medical or psychological harms to women who’ve had medically safe abortions ([Better Health Channel 2020](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/myths-and-facts-about-abortion)).

Legal restrictions or bans on abortion are not effective in deterring people from getting abortions. For instance, 97% of women in Latin America live in countries where abortions are restricted or prohibited by law. A study published in the *Lancet* found that in Latin American countries, there were 44 abortions per 1000 women aged 15 to 44. But in the US, where abortions are legally permitted and accessible, there were 13 abortions per 1000 women ([Kramer 2016](https://www.businessinsider.com/anti-abortion-womens-health-effects-2016-7?IR=T)).

When governments make abortions inaccessible by law, the number of unsafe abortions rises. An estimated 47,000 women die every year due to complications of unsafe abortions ([Kramer 2016](https://www.businessinsider.com/anti-abortion-womens-health-effects-2016-7?IR=T)).

**Questions for Discussion:**

According to virtue ethics, an action is morally permissible whenever a virtuous person, acting in character, might do it under the circumstances.

1. Are there are any circumstances where a virtuous woman might choose to have an abortion? Consider: when the pregnancy threatens the woman’s life, when the pregnancy results from a rape, or when the woman simply does not wish to be a mother yet.
2. If there are such circumstances, do you agree with virtue ethics that it’s morally permissible to have an abortion whenever a virtuous woman might choose to do it? Or do you think that the morality of abortion has nothing to do with what a virtuous person might do?

**References:**

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