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Source: *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 1995, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1995), pp. 55-64

Published by: Wiley

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24354038>

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Women, Ectogenesis and Ethical Theory

LESLIE CANNOLD

ABSTRACT *The nature of two influential theories on the moral status of abortion logically commits them to welcoming the advent of ectogenesis (the gestation of human beings outside the womb) as a solution to the abortion conflict. However, qualitative research into women's response to ectogenesis reveals that both women in favour and women opposed to abortion rights reject the technology on surprisingly similar grounds. The abortion framework which led women to reject ectogenesis as an ethical resolution to unwanted pregnancy is contrasted with the moral framework which shapes formal ethical discussions of abortion. It is argued that the need for ethical relevance requires the views of ethicists to move closer to those of women [1].*

Current medical advances in the area of infertility medicine and neonatology have made total ectogenesis (the gestation of a human being entirely outside the body of a human female) less a figment of the imagination of science fiction fantasy writers and more a realistic possibility for those living in the not so distant future. Partial ectogenesis is already a reality, as demonstrated by the creation and short-term gestation of embryos *in vitro*, and the gestation of premature babies in incubators. These developments pose a challenge to several influential philosophical theories on abortion which have presumed that abortion is synonymous with fetal death; a presumption which has and will continue to be challenged by the fast pace of medical development in the areas of infertility medicine and neonatology.

A logical reading of two influential abortion theories, which I shall call 'Severance' and 'Right to Life', leads to the conclusion that adherents of each would favour the introduction of ectogenetic technology as providing remedies for the aspects of abortion they deem problematic. In fact, a number of Severance ethicists who have anticipated the advent of ectogenesis have overtly stated their commitment to the technology.

Despite the positive attitude of ethicists towards ectogenesis, the results of qualitative research suggest that women's response to the technology would be overwhelmingly negative. This negative response was found in women who described themselves as favouring abortion rights, as well as women who said they opposed abortion rights [2]. The bulk of this paper seeks to describe the moral framework within which the women interviewed considered the morality of abortion; a framework that makes coherent the nearly unanimous rejection of women in the study of ectogenesis as a moral solution to abortion. The lack of 'fit' between women's abortion framework and the framework of Severance and Right to Life theorists suggests the need for a reconceptualisation of the latter, if ethical theory is to become relevant to women's moral needs.

Firstly, however, a brief look will be taken at the current state of ectogenetic technology, and the evidence available regarding possible advances in the area in the near future. Secondly, the precise nature of Severance and Right to Life abortion theory, and the

logically necessary commitment of these theories to ectogenesis as a solution to the abortion conflict, will be explicated. Thirdly, the methodology used in the study will be described.

The Reality of Ectogenesis

Infertility technology like IVF and the lowering age of viability [3] have already made ectogenesis a limited reality. The knowledge necessary for very early *ex utero* human development has been and will continue to be acquired by scientists working towards increasing the success rates of IVF and related infertility technologies. Current efforts in this area are directed towards improving the culture fluids in which embryos are created and gestated, in order to increase the number of viable embryos suitable for use in infertility treatment. While the intent of this experimentation is directed towards higher IVF success rates, it is clear that the knowledge gained could also be applied to sustaining very early human development *in vitro* with the goal of partial or total ectogenesis.

On the other end of the gestational continuum are the neonatal intensive care units across the developed world that bring premature babies to term inside high tech incubators (or ectogenetic wombs); babies whose prospects of life were minimal only a few decades ago. Whereas twenty years ago little could be done for babies born under 1000g, today doctors are able to ensure the survival [4] of many infants born weighing only 500 grams, or just 23 weeks old [5]. Some neonatologists have suggested that over the next decade, it will become possible to ensure the survival of babies born after only 16 to 18 weeks in the maternal womb [6].

Moreover, while funding is not made available in many countries to scientists working directly on the development of ectogenetic technology, there are some exceptions to this trend. In 1988, for example, a group of Italian scientists reported their successful incubation of an embryo for 52 hours in an artificial womb constructed of the extracted uteri of women with cancer. The scientists wrote that their study was undertaken to ‘. . . obtain the first early human pregnancy *in vitro* because future complete ectogenesis should not be ruled out’ [7]. More recently, Japanese scientists incubated a partially developed goat kid from 120 days (the equivalent of the 20th to 24th gestational week of a human fetus) until it was ready to be born 17 days later. Despite obvious developmental problems with the resulting kid [8], the scientists were reported to have been ‘pleased’ with the results, making it likely that such work will continue in the future.

‘Severance’ and ‘Right to Life’ Abortion Theory

One of the dominant theories in moral theory on abortion is Severance theory. Severance theorists [9] propose that abortion is moral because a woman’s right ‘to control her body’ overrides any right a fetus might have to life [10]. What Severance theorists assume is that the right of the mother to bodily autonomy, and any right to life held by the fetus, are in conflict if the woman does not want to carry the pregnancy to term. They assume, in other words, a state of medical technology not yet advanced enough to enable a woman to terminate her *pregnancy* without terminating the *life of the fetus*. If, however, it were possible for a woman to terminate her pregnancy without ending the fetus’s life, Severance theorists believe this would be the only moral solution to unwanted pregnancy.

Judith Jarvis Thomson's view on this point, which utilises her well-known violinist analogy, is typical:

. . . while I am arguing for the permissibility of abortion in some cases, I am not arguing for the right to secure the death of the unborn child . . . I have argued that you are not morally required to spend nine months in bed, sustaining the life of the violinist; but to say this is by no means to say that if, when you unplug yourself, there is a miracle and he survives, you then have a right to turn round and slit his throat. [11]

Similarly, Christine Overall, who explicitly recognises that ' . . . in the future, expulsion from the uterus will ordinarily not result in the death of the embryo/foetus' [12], contends that 'The pregnant woman (or anyone else, e.g., a physician) has no right to kill the embryo/foetus' [13].

The manner in which severance theory justifies abortion logically compels its adherents to embrace ectogenesis as a solution to the moral difficulties they believe abortion poses. Ectogenesis enables a woman to evacuate an unwanted fetus — thereby exercising her right to bodily autonomy — without forcing her to violate any right a fetus might have to life. Thus, ectogenesis eliminates the aspect of abortion (the death of the fetus) that Severance theorists believe undesirable.

Compared to the intricacies of Severance abortion theory, the Right to Life position on abortion is simple and unambiguous. Adherents decry abortion as murder because they believe that a fetus, either as a human being or a potential human being, has a right to life. Because the termination of pregnancy has been seen as inextricable from the death of the fetus, abortion — because it causes the death of the fetus — has been seen as morally wrong.

Because ectogenetic technology would mean that abortion need no longer entail the death of the fetus [14], abortion can no longer be objected to on the ground that it violates the fetus's right to life. Thus, Right to Life theorists are logically compelled to welcome ectogenetic technology as a solution to the problematic aspects of abortion they describe.

Methodology

The study was conducted to investigate women's responses to ectogenesis, and whether their responses would cohere with the responses to the technology to which Severance and Right to Life abortion theorists are logically committed. It was predicted that women's construction of abortion would fundamentally differ from that articulated by Severance theorists, and that this would lead most women to reject ectogenesis as a moral solution to unwanted pregnancy. Forty-five Australian women, all resident in the state of Victoria, were interviewed in groups of between five and ten participants. Women with similar attitudes towards the morality of abortion were interviewed together. Women were recruited to the project through community and mass-media advertising.

Interview sessions lasted between one and two hours, and were recorded. Women were asked for their responses to five scenarios, of which the most important to the concerns of this paper were the 'Abortion' and 'Ectogenesis' scenarios, which read as follows:

'Abortion' — If pregnant with a child you could not keep, would you choose to

have an abortion, or would you choose to have the child and give it up for adoption? Why?

‘Ectogenesis’ — Imagine that you are two months pregnant. You do not want to raise the child or are unable to do so and thus must decide between having an abortion or carrying the child to term and giving it up for adoption. As you are considering these options, a doctor approaches you and tells you that you have a third option. Thanks to technology, it is now possible for you to abort your fetus without killing it. Your fetus can be extracted from your body and transferred to an artificial womb where it will be grown until it is able to live outside of that artificial womb (at around nine months) then will be put up for adoption. The doctor informs you that this procedure carries no more medical risks or inconvenience to you than the traditional abortion method [15]. Would you choose this third option?

Participants also completed a questionnaire designed to collect demographic and other basic information. Content analysis technique was used to analyse the transcribed interviews. Given the small, unrepresentative nature of the sample, standard warnings apply regarding the applicability of the findings to the population of Australian women. The names of all the women quoted in this paper are pseudonyms.

Women’s Response to Ectogenesis

The data demonstrated a significant discrepancy between the attitudes of Severance and Right to Life theorists towards ectogenesis, and women’s [16] attitudes towards the technology. An analysis of women’s words reveals that the discrepancy between their attitudes and the attitudes of ethicists is grounded in the inadequate understanding both Severance and Right to Life theorists have of the framework within which women consider the morality of abortion; a framework which enables both women in favour of and women opposed to abortion rights of women to disagree on the morality of abortion, but agree on the moral unacceptability of ectogenesis.

Women in Favour of Abortion Rights

Women in favour of abortion rights view abortion as a moral response to unwanted pregnancy. This view is grounded in their beliefs about the moral responsibilities of mothers to their fetuses and the children they could become. Women in this group believe that a woman has a responsibility to either gestate, bear and raise her fetus and the resulting child or, if she is unable to undertake these responsibilities, to abort the fetus and by so doing prevent the further development of the fetus and the consequent creation of a child to which she has wide-ranging and inescapable responsibilities. This perspective on the moral meaning and justification of abortion radically differs from that provided by Severance theorists, who justify abortion on the grounds that it enables women to exercise their right to bodily autonomy. The way women in favour of abortion rights shape the abortion dilemma makes coherent their rejection of ectogenesis.

What comes through clearly in the responses of women in favour of abortion rights is the responsibility they feel for their fetuses and the children they could become; a responsibility

that seems to be derived not only from their sense of duty to a vulnerable being dependent on their care, but from the strong emotional response the fetus, as a being that could become their child, generates within them. The response of one of the participants, Charity, captures some of these feelings:

. . . when you have an abortion, you are making a decision about your own body and about that human's life. Whereas, if you give it away, someone else is making all those decisions, or technology is making all the decisions . . . I imagine that my decisions would affect my child in a more humane manner, because I've got my child's interests at heart. And that's why I'd decide to terminate, for that child's sake. If you give it away to technology, you don't know what you're doing.

Mothers, women in this group argue, may restrict their role to simply the genetic or gestational contributors to the life of their fetuses and the children they could become, but good mothers are ones that accept and perhaps even rejoice in the role of nurturer and parent of their fetus/child [17]. However, if a woman is unable to undertake the significant responsibilities entailed in being a good mother to her fetus/child, women in favour of abortion rights believe it morally acceptable — and in many cases morally laudable — for her to acquit herself of these responsibilities by choosing to terminate the life of the fetus.

Women's sense of responsibility to their fetus, as a vulnerable human for whom they had a specific duty of care, can be seen in the concern they repeatedly voiced about the fate of the fetus in the ectogenetic womb. Women worried, in other words, that once the fetus was removed from their bodies — the realm in which they exercised control over the fetus and thus could ensure its protection — it could fall prey to a wide array of physical, emotional and social risks. For instance Emily, a woman interviewed, was concerned that a fetus reared in an ectogenetic womb wouldn't be a 'proper fetus with every limb to it', while another research participant, Carey, worried about the 'emotional, spiritual and mental' well-being of an artificially gestated fetus. These are just two examples amongst many that demonstrate the sense of duty women in the sample felt they had to protect their vulnerable fetus from the dangers it could encounter if removed from the protection of their bodies. Women in favour of abortion rights believed these were risks to which a good mother would not expose her fetus.

The other aspect of women's sense of responsibility to their fetuses derives not from the fetus's vulnerability and dependence upon them, but from the fetus's status as a being that could become their child. Women's belief in the power and inviolable nature of the maternal/fetus-child bond is evidenced by the concerns they express about relinquishing their fetus/child to an ectogenetic womb. This can be seen in research participant Callie's conclusions about the moral implications of 'putting another person on the planet':

No matter what you thought, there's a life here, and you are in some way responsible . . . you are responsible for putting another person on the planet . . . they would have to come back, or they'd be wanting their medical history . . . You are still responsible for them.

If the fetus is born, women believe it will be *their* child, and they believe they have an extensive range of obligations to children that are theirs; foremost amongst them is the obligation to raise them. Over and over again women ground their rejection of adoption [18] and ectogenesis in a belief that it would be morally irresponsible of them to bring a child into the world they were unwilling or unable to parent. When Jacinta worries about not being

able to ‘control what was happening’ with a child given away, and Charity worries about damaging a child ‘. . . by not having any influence on them’, both women underscore their belief that women have a moral responsibility to raise their own [19] children. To bring a child into existence is to accept responsibility for their child’s well-being, perhaps for life. As Carey explains, once you have put ‘another person on the planet’, regardless of who rears them, ‘. . . you are . . . responsible for them’.

This belief about the nature of maternal responsibility elucidates the rejection by women in this group of both adoption and ectogenesis as irresponsible abdications by women of their maternal responsibilities. This is because in both cases the child remains alive, and women believe that if their child is alive, it is their responsibility to nurture it *in utero*, to give birth to it and to raise it once it is born. To abandon one’s fetus to a machine constitutes a morally unacceptable abandonment of a woman’s maternal duty to care for her fetus.

If a good mother raises her own children, the only solution for a woman who does not want or is unable to undertake this task is for her to prevent her child *coming into existence in the first place*. One suspects that the ideal solution for many women in this situation would be to turn back the clock to a time before they became pregnant. However, this being impossible, women are forced to embrace the only solution available to the quandary they articulate: abortion. What this suggests is that what women intend in choosing abortion is not only to terminate their *pregnancy*, but to end *the life of their fetus*. Charity sums up this position well when she says:

. . . my decision to have an abortion would be the decision I made to care for the child that was within me. So to have the child outside somewhere else would be more cruel to me than just ending it because it’s giving the child no help. It’s still just saying, ‘well, it’s not my problem’ . . . when you have an abortion you are making a decision about your own body and about that human’s life.

Although never articulated directly, women in this group clearly felt that to terminate their fetus was not necessarily to visit upon it a punishment. In other words, the fact that abortion results in the death of the fetus does not necessarily mean that women believe they wrong their fetus by aborting it. A moral abortion decision is based on the woman’s caring evaluation of the outcome of continuing the pregnancy for both herself and her fetus/child as an interconnected unit [20]. The woman must evaluate the impact on herself of rearing the child and how her response to that task would consequently affect the fetus and child it could become. If the woman’s decision to abort is based on her caring evaluation of the outcome of continuing the pregnancy for her maternal/fetal-child unit, abortion is not only seen as permissible, but often the most moral solution in the situation. Gillian captures the nature of the interconnectedness between a woman and fetus when she says:

I was thinking about the baby too. The adoption part was still not an issue in my decision. But I thought definitely for the baby, I didn’t want it. How much more can you think about the baby — what a miserable life it was going to have. I just didn’t want it.

A number of assumptions underlie the belief of a number of women, here articulated by Gillian, that a mother’s decision to abort based on an evaluation that continuing the pregnancy would harm her maternal/fetal-child unit, is morally justified. I will now seek to identify and explicate these assumptions briefly.

The first belief concerns what I have called the maternal/fetal-child unit. As already noted, women in this group believe that mothers and their children should remain together through the gestational period, and through the remainder of the child's dependent life. Thus in the quote above, Gillian is weighing the impact of abortion on her maternal/fetal-child unit as against the impact of her raising the child. Neither adoption nor ectogenesis has a place in her considerations because they constitute in her mind a morally unacceptable abandonment of her responsibility to her fetus.

The second assumption underlying this line of reasoning is that the fetus is not the moral equivalent of a child born. Although infanticide was not a topic that arose in the majority of interviews, it is this researcher's opinion that women in this group would not view the desire of a woman to kill her *child*, because she viewed the prospects for their maternal/fetal-child unit unfavourably, in the same light that they would view her decision to kill her *fetus* for the same reason. Women, in other words, view abortion as a way to *prevent the creation* of something for which, once it comes into being, they will be inescapably responsible [21].

The third assumption underlying the words of Gillian and women who share her point of view is that the killing of one being by another is not necessarily a morally unacceptable act [22]. Predicated on their belief that the mother and her fetus/child should remain as a unit, and that the fetus does not yet have the moral significance of the child, women believe that a loving and caring assessment by the mother that her maternal/fetal-child unit will be harmed were she to allow her child to be born constitutes adequate justification for a woman to choose to terminate the life of her fetus through abortion. If the woman's intentions and motives in choosing abortion are to do what is best for her maternal/fetal-child unit, she can be understood to be 'killing from care' [23]. For women in this group, a decision to 'kill from care' can often be seen to be the most responsible choice she can make to resolve an unwanted pregnancy.

Women's reasoning regarding the morality of abortion and adoption as solutions to unwanted pregnancy informs their perspective on ectogenesis. Ectogenesis results in the creation of a child to which the woman feels a maternal sense of responsibility. It creates, in other words, a woman's 'own' child, and it is *precisely this event that women seek to avoid by choosing abortion*. Thus women in favour of abortion rights reject ectogenesis because it both constitutes an impermissible abandonment by the woman of her responsibility to care for her fetus, and results in her assuming maternal responsibility for a child that she is either unwilling or unable to assume.

Let us now turn to the framework within which women opposed to abortion rights consider the morality of abortion, and how that framework makes coherent their rejection of ectogenesis.

Women Opposed to Abortion Rights

The reasons that women opposed to abortion rights give for opposing abortion as a morally acceptable solution to unwanted pregnancy differ significantly from the reasons Right to Life theorists provide for deeming abortion an immoral response to unwanted pregnancy. For women opposed to abortion rights, the preservation of the life of the fetus is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a woman's response to unwanted pregnancy to be morally acceptable. Like women in favour of abortion rights, women in this group describe a good mother as one who accepts responsibility for the care of her fetus/child. For women opposed

to abortion rights, however, there is no morally acceptable way for a woman to escape her responsibility to gestate and raise her fetus/child once conception has taken place. Thus, for women in this group, a good mother must not only ensure the survival of all the fetuses she conceives, she must bear and raise the resulting children herself.

For women opposed to abortion rights, good women make motherhood their top priority. This can be seen in the high degree of suspicion these women evince about the motives and intentions of women seeking to terminate their pregnancies. Women who prefer their careers, their ski trips or their holidays in Europe were constantly cited as examples of women with the sort of inadequate value systems that lead them to value the material aspects of life above their rôle, or potential rôle, as mothers, and thus choose abortion as a solution to unwanted pregnancy. A good mother values her rôle, or her potential rôle, as a mother beyond all other aspects of life, placing her children, and potential children, above her own interests, ambitions and goals as an autonomous human being. For a good mother, in other words, there is no such thing as an *unwanted* pregnancy, only an *unexpected* one. A good mother's response to unexpected pregnancy is a willingness to make room in her life for the new arrival. Research participant Martina's discussion of her choice to keep her second child reflects this attitude:

. . . before I had [my children] I would have said I wouldn't choose abortion . . . I think it's wrong, and I would have said adoption straight out as being the other alternative. But . . . I've had to make that choice, with my second child, because we really couldn't afford it, but I decided to keep my second child because I just couldn't part with it . . . it was something we talked about, but I just couldn't think of doing it . . . there's too much bonding, it's too hard to do . . .

Despite the capacity of ectogenesis to preserve fetal life, it was soundly rejected by women opposed to abortion rights. Because good mothers gestate, birth and raise their own fetuses/children, ectogenesis was seen by women in this group as an expensive alternative for women to 'negate' their maternal responsibilities to their fetuses. Women in this group feared that women might attempt to utilise the ectogenetic womb to assuage their guilt about abortion, and thus were insistent that fetal evacuation be understood to constitute the same sort of maternal abandonment of responsibility for the fetus, and display the same sort of mistaken maternal values, as abortion. Grace's description of ectogenesis as a 'cop-out' is a good example of this sort of reasoning:

. . . there are always people who are ready for a cop out . . . and [ectogenesis] is an easy cop out . . . it negates their responsibility. They've put the child in a machine for someone to rear and at the end of nine months it will be another human being . . . but for that person it is just a cop out . . . they can say . . . I haven't had an abortion so therefore I haven't done anything wrong . . . [but] there is something wrong with taking it out of you and sticking it in a machine (Grace).

Thus, women opposed to abortion rights reject abortion not only because it terminates the life of the fetus, but because they believe women should gestate and raise all the fetuses/children they conceive. This view of abortion explains why women in this group reject adoption and ectogenesis as immoral solutions to unwanted pregnancy. In fact, ectogenesis becomes, according to this view, even more problematic than adoption because evacuating a child to an ectogenetic womb means that not only is a woman rejecting her moral

responsibility to *raise* her own child, but she is also rejecting her responsibility to *gestate* her own child. Thus, while for women in favour of abortion rights, ectogenesis is problematic because it preserves the life of the fetus, and with that life, a woman's maternal responsibilities, for women opposed to abortion rights, ectogenesis is a concern because it continues to enable women to avoid their responsibility to gestate, bear and raise the children they conceive.

The Need and Responsibility for Change

How should ethicists respond to the disjuncture between women's moral framework on abortion and the moral framework dominating formal ethical discourse? If there is a need for change, in other words, who is it that needs to do the changing?

I would argue that there is a need for change, primarily [24] because of the irrelevance of moral theory to women's moral needs. If we accept that at least one of the goals of moral theory is to assist people to think clearly about the ethical dilemmas they face, and to make ethical decisions, then it is imperative that ethicists and the people whom they are seeking to guide — in this case women — are speaking the same language.

What this research demonstrates is that while much of the content of women's deliberations about unwanted pregnancy is unfamiliar to ethicists, the tone and tenor of these deliberations have the familiar ring of the moral. It is important that ethicists respect women's moral views on abortion and related questions, as well as attend to their content, if their contribution to the formal ethical debate on these subjects is to be meaningful.

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NOTES

- [1] I am indebted to Professor Peter Singer, Dr Justin Oakley and Ms Lynn Gillam for their comments on previous drafts of this paper.
- [2] Discussion of abortion has evolved to the point where the use of the word 'baby' or 'fetus', 'pro-life' or 'pro-choice' indicates sympathy for one or the other side of the argument. In this paper I have opted for the description of 'fetus' when the life remains within the woman's body, and baby when it is outside. The terms 'opposed to abortion rights' and 'in favour of abortion rights' have been used for those who label themselves 'pro-life' and 'pro-choice' respectively. These choices were made in the admittedly futile hope of offending no one, and the more realistic one that whatever offence is caused will be evenly distributed amongst those on both sides of the controversy.
- [3] Viability is typically described as the potential of the fetus to be born alive, and to survive independently of its mother — albeit with artificial aid.
- [4] This figure is a survival rate only and does not reflect the high percentage of extremely low birthweight infants who suffer some form of physical, psychological, social and/or intellectual disablement as a result of their extreme prematurity.
- [5] The usual duration of a pregnancy is 40 weeks, and typical birthweights around 3500g.
- [6] CAMPBELL, DR N. (1991), personal communication.
- [7] BULLETTI, et al. (1988) Early human pregnancy in vitro utilizing an artificially perfused uterus, *Fertility and Sterility*, 49:6.
- [8] It was unable to stand or breathe by itself, a consequence of the sedatives administered to keep it from swallowing the 'amniotic fluid' in its gestational sac. See HADFIELD, P. (1992) Japanese pioneers raise kid in rubber womb, *New Scientist*, 25 April.

- [9] Amongst the ranks of severance theorists are Mary Anne Warren, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Christine Overall and Sissela Bok.
- [10] This point has been argued with the right to life of the fetus both accepted and rejected as a premise.
- [11] THOMSON, J. J. (1986) A defence of abortion, in P. SINGER (Ed.) *Applied Ethics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- [12] OVERALL, C. (1987) *Ethics and Human Reproduction: a feminist analysis* (London, Allen & Unwin).
- [13] OVERALL, op. cit.
- [14] In fact, our current ectogenetic capacities mean that late second and third trimester abortions need not entail the death of the fetus. That the 'rescue' of these fetuses via ectogenetic wombs has not been suggested by Right to Life political organisations lends credence to the argument made in this paper that the destruction of fetal life is only one of the objections Right to Lifers have to abortion.
- [15] It is unlikely that, were ectogenesis to become a reality, fetal evacuation would be as medically safe for women as current vacuum aspiration abortion methods. However, the scenario was shaped in this way in order to curtail certain areas of discussion.
- [16] For simplicity's sake, I shall refer at times to the values, beliefs and opinions of women surveyed in this study as those of 'women'. Readers should bear in mind that the current sample can not be considered representative of the population of Australian women.
- [17] For the sake of brevity, I shall use the expression 'fetus/child' in some instances as shorthand for the more cumbersome 'fetus, and the child it could become'.
- [18] The rejection of adoption by women in favour of abortion rights has been seen as one of the most interesting and controversial findings of this study. The concerns of this paper, however, restrict further discussion of this finding here.
- [19] The scenarios used in this research made it impossible to distinguish whether a woman felt a fetus/child was 'her own' because of her genetic contribution, gestational contribution, or some combination of both.
- [20] Henceforth to be referred to as the maternal/fetal-child unit.
- [21] Of course, this raises questions about the precise point at which women consider the fetus to obtain moral significance, and the reasons women have for choosing this point. Unfortunately, the scope of the research precluded my further exploring the nature of women's reasoning on this point.
- [22] The ethical debate around euthanasia is also challenging the notion that killing — for reasons other than self-defence — is to commit a moral wrong. Of course, the fact that the people at issue regarding euthanasia are both beings who have been born, and are or were at one time competent makes the relevant considerations in these cases substantially different to those pertinent when the killing of fetuses through abortion is at issue.
- [23] I am indebted to Dr Michael Smith at the Philosophy Department at Monash University for coining this phrase.
- [24] There is another argument to be made in favour of ethicists respecting and attending to women's abortion framework; an argument that focuses primarily on the conformity of women's judgements to well-known standards for moral judgements. However, space constraints prohibit my making this argument here.