Danielle Turner

PHIL 330

Dr. Andrea Veltman

Morality of Abortion

**Introduction**

The morality around abortion has been debated for decades in history. Most arguments for pro-life stem from religious beliefs while pro-choice arguments focus on a child-bearers right to decide. In this essay, I will critique Don Marquis essay, *Why Abortion is Immoral,* by focusing on his failure to address special circumstances to have abortions and the comparison he uses for adult humans versus a fetus to support his main argument. Overall, I feel that his argument fails to attempt justification on why abortions are immoral.

**Failing to Address “Special Circumstances”**

At the beginning of his essay, Marquis states that some anti-abortionists (pro-lifers) believe that in certain special circumstances, like a mother’s life being threatened or in cases of rape, that abortions should be allowed. He clarifies after this statement that in his essay he will not “explore the casuistry of these hard cases” (Marquis, 1989). While these cases are hard, they are more prevalent in the United States and need to be addressed when deciding whether or not abortion is immoral. The National Insurance Crime Bureau reported that an estimated 32,101 pregnancies of adult women were results of rape each year (Holmes, Resnick, Kilpatrick, & Best, 1996). Additionally, the report states that fifty-percent of these women underwent abortions and another eleven percent had a spontaneous abortion. Furthermore, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that each year over 700 women die from complications of childbirth (CDC, 2019). Without the ability to have abortions, many more women would die each year from these complications. By ignoring these statistics, Don Marquis fails to provide substance for his argument that all abortions are immoral. Lastly, Marquis writes that his general claim for his argument is that the “overwhelming majority of deliberate abortions are seriously immoral” yet he does not provide any distinction on what a deliberate abortion is or if these special circumstances fit the criteria for deliberate abortions.

**Killing Adults Argument**

Marquis begins his main argument on why it is wrong to kill adult humans by stating

three points: the effect on the murderer, the effect on family and friends, and its effect on the victim. Although I agree with his reasoning on why it is wrong to kill an adult human, I disagree that the argument can be applied to a fetus. Adult humans have the ability to reason and think while a fetus cannot comprehend languages nor develops a brain until four weeks after conception. Without the ability to think, one cannot mourn a loss of what the future might hold which Marquis uses as a main argument on why abortions are immoral. Each day adult humans have accidents which can lead them to become brain dead and forced into a medically induced coma to keep them alive by machines. Families or close friends, given the right, may decide to stop their lives, by signing over paperwork that would turn off the machines keeping them alive. Due to the patients being brain dead, there is no future for them to mourn or for them to be able to think about what they are missing. If this is applied to a human fetus, which within the first four weeks does not have a brain, then abortions may be looked at as the equivalent of ending an adult human’s life who is brain dead. Is it wrong or immoral to end a loved one suffering due to their inability to live and think?

Additionally, Marquis attempts to relate his argument to euthanasia by stating that adult humans who choose to end their life because of illness and will suffer from it are not at a loss of life. As I have stated previously, adult humans who wish to make the decision to end their life have the ability to rationally process their decisions. His argument is flawed because adult human beings have the capabilities of rational thought unlike human fetuses. At the end of this portion of his argument, Marquis attempts to further support his argument that adult humans and human fetuses are the same in wrongness of killing by stating “morally permissible abortions will be rare indeed unless, perhaps, they occur so early in pregnancy a fetus is not yet defintiely an individual” (p. 263). Yet, with this statement, Marquis seems to discredit his own argument thaat abortions are immoral because if done early enough the fetus is not an individual. I find this argument flawed because he does not determine when the fetus becomes an individual to support his claim.

**Conclusion**

In his essay, Marquis fails to make a justifiable argument on why abortions are wrong due to his lack of connecting adult humans lives to that of a fetuses. He does not seem to acknowledge the fact that a fetus does not develop a brain, in which the ability to have rational thoughts occurs, until mid-way through his argument when he states that abortions may seem permissible if performed early enough in the pregnancy. By stating this, he does not include what a time or point in a pregnancy when a abortion would be permissible which seems to discredit his arguement to killing a person is wrong because his deprives them of their future. Furthermore, by not addressing special circumstances he deprives many child-bearing individuals the acknowledgement they deserve on why their abortions are needed. Overall, his essay fails to make a valid argument for his overall message that abortions are infact immoral.

References

CDC. (2019, February 26). Pregnancy-Related Deaths. Retrieved from

https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pregnancy-relatedmortality.htm

Holmes, M. M., Resnick, H. S., Kilpatrick, D. G., & Best, C. L. (1996). Rape-related pregnancy:

Estimates and descriptive characteristics from a national sample of women. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, *175*(2), 320–325. doi: 10.1016/s0002-9378(96)70141-2

Marquis, D. (1989). Why Abortion is Immoral. The Journal of Philosophy, 86(4), 183. Doi:

10.2307/2026961