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REVIEW ARTICLE

WHAT MAKES KILLING WRONG? THE IMPLICATION OF MARQUIS'S VIEW FOR THE MORALITY OF ABORTION

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights what makes killing wrong according to Marquis. Killing a human being is morally and legally prohibited, except in a few rare cases under which it is permitted and justified. Marquis claimed that it is unjustifiable to deprive a human being the future experiences he was bound to enjoy. Marquis' claim that abortion is the same as killing a human being who is already born, and the difference lies only in the premise of the arguments. In conclusion, the arguments that justify or prohibit abortion are mainly based on biological and theological theories. The theory of personhood features prominently in these arguments, but Marquis omits them in his discussion on why killing is immoral. Life is precious to everyone including those unborn babies considered not to have an opinion; thus, it is necessary to center on appropriate ideals.

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INTRODUCTION

Killing a human being is morally and legally prohibited, except in a few rare cases under which it is permitted and justified. The recent philosophical literatures have diverse facets on the topic of abortion. On one hand, there are views consider abortion is morally acceptable while on the other hand, other views deny the abortion and consider it immoral. Philosophical debates on the subject of abortion revolve around the issue of "personhood" among others. Marquis bases his argument on the value attached to a human being's future (Marquis, 1989) to justify his stand against killing and abortion. This article highlights what makes killing wrong according to Marquis. Then, this article presents the implication of his view for the morality of abortion. At the end of this article, the in-depth criticism of Marquis' view is developed.

Marquis' view on why killing is wrong

The views expressed by Marquis on why it is immoral to take away human life are that; killing a person is wrong, not because of the effect the death has on the murderer or those around the victim, but what it does to him/her (Marquis, 1989). A homicide takes away what the victim values most, his/her life and the enjoyment of a valuable future (Marquis, 1989). Marquis claimed that it is unjustifiable to deprive a human being the future experiences he was bound to enjoy. Every person has dreams and aspirations, plans for future activities and projects, and denying him/her a chance to fulfill all these is immoral, according to Marquis. Marquis opined that a person

cannot suffer a loss that is more dreadful than the loss of one's own life (Marquis, 1989). Inflicting such a loss on any one is only justifiable in extremely rare occasions (Marquis 1989; Sinnott-Armstrong, 1999). Marquis attached a lot of weight on the future experiences of a person and assumes that the future of human beings is of immense value. It is, therefore, immoral to end another's life and cause him/her such immense loss. Marquis extended this view to the debate on abortion and argued that the same reasons that make it morally unacceptable to kill an adult person also apply in cases of abortion. He opined that fetuses too are organisms that have a future and it is immoral to deny them the chance to enjoy this future, just like an adult human being.

Implications of this view on the morality of abortion

Anti-abortion campaigners justify the immorality of abortion with arguments which are based on biological and theological theories (Sinnott-Armstrong, 1999). Many argue that an individual's life takes form at the moment of conception and, therefore, abortion is akin to the murder of an adult in cold blood. The argument is that even if the embryo is still microscopic and has not yet developed human characteristics in order to be termed as a real human being, it is still a person whose killing is unjustifiable. The genetic makeup of that embryo makes it a human being (Brown, 2000). The arguments against abortion that revolve around "personhood" also invoke the right to life to which that "person" is entitled (Tooley, 1972). One would, for instance, argue that from the moment of conception, the embryo has a right to live (Savulescu, 2002), and this right should not be interfered with except in the few

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cases where the exception is applicable. These utterances are akin to Marquis' claim that abortion is the same as killing a human being who is already born, and the difference lies only in the premise of the arguments. Pro-abortionists on the other hand, employ a lot of effort in separating "personhood" from an unborn baby. Many attach various characteristics to an organism for it to be properly referred to as a person, such as the ability to be conscious and feel (Tooley, 1972). They argue that in the absence of these characteristics, no organism can lay a claim on the right to live, and that one becomes a "person" after birth. Philosophers such as Tooley and Singer opined that the killing of a fetus is different from the killing of a person who has already been born. According to these philosophers, the immorality of abortion stems from other factors separate from the human nature of a fetus. Marquis' argument is devoid of any trappings of biological or theological theories that typify most arguments on the morality of abortion. This sets his view apart from the rest, and he points out these differences. Marquis' argument solely lies on the proposition that fetuses and embryos are organisms that have a future just like that of other human beings (Marquis, 1989) and not on their nature as "proper human beings". He refuses to get into a discussion on whether or not they can determine the experiences they are yet to undergo.

Marquis' assertion that the reasons which justify or prohibit the killing of an adult person apply equally in cases of abortion has a significant effect on the debate on the morality of abortion. First of all, Marquis exposed the weaknesses that characterize the existing morality of abortion theories. Anti-abortion and pro-abortion theories are projected to be either too wide or narrow in order to suit the views of the proponent. Marquis' views introduce another level of morality in considering the reasons that would justify an abortion. By demanding that one looks at the issue as if a human being who has already been born is involved, Marquis seems to suggest that a fetus is equal in rights as any other living human being. Though this may not be legally enforceable since the law only recognizes the legal entity of persons who have already been born, his claims render unacceptable any justification of abortion based on reasons such as that the fetus is not a real human being. The views that Marquis expresses imply that a fetus is equal in rights to a person who has already been born. The two are treated as equals and the only difference between them is their different stages of development. There is an expectation that this fetus will have a life to look forward to and enjoy. The fetus will have dreams to fulfill, and being an unborn does not diminish this fact in any way. These views also imply that the moral wrong of abortion is no lesser than the killing of an adult. The moral implications are not different in both cases.

Criticism of Marquis' view

Marquis delivers a persuasive argument that it is wrong to kill another human being or abort an unborn baby because that will deprive these victims of their valuable future. Many criticisms to this argument have been advanced by different philosophers such as Sinnott-Armstrong, Brown, Tooley, and Savulescu. My criticism of Marquis' views is based on the inability of his propositions to quantify a "valuable future". Marquis seems to assume that every individual has a happy life to look forward to, and that every other person values their future. This may not

be universally true, as many people live in despair and do not foresee a happy life in their future. They do not look forward to the future and/or attach considerable value to it. Some of these individuals go ahead and commit suicide and though this may be as a result of a variety of reasons, it is proof that they prefer death over life and their future. If such a person is killed, will it still be reasonable to argue that he/she has been robbed of a valuable future?

Adults are able to imagine their futures and take steps towards achieving them. Brown argues that a fetus or an infant on the other hand, is not capable of having a self-represented future and, therefore, it is difficult to attach any value to their future as they represent it. I will deviate from these propositions and limit myself to how possible it is to measure the value of a future. It is possible for doctors to determine the health status and development progress of a fetus. When it is discovered that it is significantly malformed or suffering from a dreadful medical condition, can the future of this fetus be said to be valuable? There are various forms of malformations that cause a lot of suffering to someone and his/her future may be said to be invaluable in this premise. Marquis seems to acknowledge that an abortion may be justified under circumstances such as these. However, how does one quantify a life's value? Is it in terms of good health, riches, happiness, or what categorization can be used to measure value? Marquis fails to answer these questions in his argument.

Conclusion

Abortion is a subject that raises many ethical and moral issues. The arguments that justify or prohibit abortion are mainly based on biological and theological theories. The theory of personhood features prominently in these arguments, but Marquis omits them in his discussion on why killing is immoral. His views have impacted the abortion debate in various ways, and many philosophers have expressed different criticisms to the same. My personal point of view is the life is important and needs protection regardless of its stage. I believe there should be campaigns that encourage people to avoid pregnancies that are not very necessary so that in the end, there is no need for abortions. Life is precious to everyone including those unborn babies considered not to have an opinion; thus, it is necessary to center on appropriate ideals.

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