

## **Abortion: The Ultimate Crime or the Perfect Answer?**

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American's are taught to believe that their basic freedoms are protected by an old document that bears the promise of our forefather's signatures. The Bill of Rights may be secure behind bullet proof glass, but what prevents human beings from taking open fire on other's individual rights? The United States made a contractual relationship with its citizens to keep a strict separation between the ideals of church and state. On paper the system seems to work efficiently. Children cannot be forced to read the Bible in history class or recite religious hymns during music hour, but the roots of religious morale are still embedded in the political system. It is an embarrassment as an American to say that we live in a society that prides itself on democracy and then turns around and denies human beings the power over their own bodies.

Abortion should not be a public health issue that complete strangers have the power to delegate or to restrict. Politicians look at the debate of abortion as an issue that needs to be *dealt with*. The reaction from a Congressperson's voting district and reputation among colleagues are major influences on their stance concerning a piece of legislature. A conservative, predominately religious region is not going to be bashful about supporting anti-abortion laws. While a representative cannot stand up and say, "Abortion is against the religion of my constituents" he is a puppet under the voters'

control. Obsessed with protecting the rights of the unborn child, the liberty of the mother to choose the fate of her own body has been deprived.

Abortion did not always carry with it the taboo connotation that it does today. For teenagers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the fear of accidental pregnancy is constantly lingering overhead. Getting an abortion is made out to be a humiliating and shameful experience to both the pregnant girl and her parents. As if struggling with one's own image and sexual identity isn't enough to bear, the possibility of shaming one's entire family is an ever present threat to young women in our society. Parents, academic and religious teachers and the media whom would rather make the issue disappear are not helping anyone, least of all the teenagers they are trying to protect.

Of course, abortions are not only sought after by desperate teenagers trying to ditch the responsibility of motherhood. Adult women are spared no level of shame that is experienced by the younger victims. The thought of opening up the Washington Post to the advertisement section and seeing a sales pitch for an abortion clinic is almost comical. Before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century it was the norm to find such advertisements in newspapers. Women were not cast aside as public enemy #1 for making the individual decision to terminate a pregnancy before it was too late. Women could attempt self-abortions using herbs and drugs by going to see an apothecary or even through the mail (Joffe, 1995). One would think that the progression of time and advancements in technology would make it easier on women to decide whether or not to bring a child into this world. On the contrary, "It is apparent that at common law, at the time of the adoption of our Constitution, and throughout the major portion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, abortion was viewed with less disfavor than under most American statutes currently in effect" (Hickey, 1999).

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S has thrived on a social and economic level. Credit is given to the open door and open minded policies in which America does business. In a country so accommodating to the customs and lifestyles of foreign influences it is a wonder why our open-mindedness does not extend the same courteously to its own people.

*“One’s philosophy, one’s experiences, one’s exposure to the raw edges of human existence, one’s religious training, one’s attitudes toward life and family and their values, and the moral standards one establishes and seeks to observe, are all likely to influence and to color one’s thinking and conclusions about abortion”* (Hickey, 1999).

Mr. Justice Blackmun delivered the opinion of the Court in the landmark case of Roe v. Wade in 1973. The Texas statutes prohibiting abortion were declared undeniably unconstitutional. Whether he was fully aware of the impact of his words or not, Blackmun revealed that denying women of the choice to host another human being in their womb is an outright deprivation of their basic right to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” No person is the same in body, mind and spirit. Having a child might be a blessing to one woman and a curse to the next. A single definition of acting out in a correct or an incorrect manner cannot be offered here because of the exceptions in each case. No matter how irrational or cruel one’s decision might seem to an outsider it is not their place to force their belief system on another.

Religion construes the justification of abortion by establishing a universal ethical and moral code that turns pro-choice into a sin against humanity. The Hippocratic Oath displays the relationship between religion and medicine by instilling an ethical guide onto ancient day physicians. The great Greek who has been described as the Father of Medicine set these words in stone: “I will give no deadly medicine to anyone if asked,

nor suggest any such counsel; and in like manner I will not give to a woman a pessary to produce abortion” (Hickey, 1999). The emerging teachings of Christianity conveniently agreed with the moral code of the Oath and the association of aborting a pregnancy with religious sin, “became the nucleus of all medical ethics” (Hickey, 1999).

The denouncement of abortion that stems from religion is not an outright slander of the idea of *liberty* itself. Instead, it extends the right to life and liberty to the unborn being. This viewpoint states that the mother should not make decisions for two people when only her liberties are taken into account. It asks, “What about the rights of the unborn child?” From this student’s stance, while everyone is so interested in protecting the rights of a non-entity those same liberties are being denied to the living human being, in this case the mother. The state has no invested interest in protecting a fetus that does not exist separately outside the womb. “Not until sentience is reached, roughly at viability in the twenty-fourth to the twenty-sixth weeks of pregnancy does the fetus develop interests in its own right” (Robertson, 1994). If the fetus were to be considered a person at the time of conception, then it would have already developed an anatomy and a personality. Believing in the soul of a person-to-be is not concrete proof to use the words *abortion* and *murder* along the same lines. “In biological terms, a fertilized egg, embryo, or fetus cannot be a person or even a moral subject with interests because it is too underdeveloped biologically.” (Robertson, 1994). When we try to determine when an unborn fetus develops the qualities of an actual being we step into dangerous ground. A soul might exist in theory but in reality there is no physical proof; therefore, it cannot be saved or killed.

Pro-choice advocates are not fighting for the allowance to use abortion as a form of unlimited birth control. Opponents will use any angle to paint a distorted picture of dangerous deviant behavior. Avid anti-abortion politicians and spokespersons attempt to lead a crusade for the preservation of life when it is not their fight to either win or lose. Comparing abortion to outright murder and labeling advocates as malicious destroyers of precious life blurs the real issue. We are not just fighting for pro-abortion legislation, but defending the preservation of women's rights. The women's movement did not sacrifice their sweat and tears to gain equal rights in a man's world so we could give up now. Incriminating people as "baby killers" makes the general public forget why fighting for the power to choose is not just important for pregnant women, but for the future of all women.

The real offense at hand is that a woman's privacy over her body is violated by what society deems acceptable at the moment. No legislation should have the power to deny a human being the rights they are granted in the Constitution. This is especially true when a decision that affects women directly is put in the hands of mostly middle-aged, male politicians. Although the explicit mention to privacy is not stated in so many words, roots of the right are found in the First, Fourth, and Fifth Amendments. The Ninth Amendment reserves basic freedoms to the people and the concept of personal liberty is ensured in the first section of the Fourteenth Amendment (Hickey, 1999). "The right of privacy is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy" (Hickey, 1999). The fact that the U.S provides its citizen with laws and privileges of the land gives individuals authority over their actions. The Constitution represents a "clear relation to the right to decide activities relating to marriage,

procreation, contraception, family relationships, child rearing and education” (Hickey, 1999). Americans accept the burden of increased responsibility in exchange for obtaining ultimate power over their destiny.

The consequences of leaving a woman powerless over child bearing can be detrimental to the future of the newborn and the mother. An unwanted child is not going to receive the love and affection that they deserve. The mother may always hold onto feelings of regret that are commonly taken out on the child in forms of mental or physical abuse. Often the parent even turns their own regret into disdain for the child. It is not the child’s fault that the mother decided to participate in a sexual experience that left her pregnant, but often it is the child that pays the highest price.

Pressures of maternity or child birth may be too strenuous for the mother’s physical and emotional strength to fully recover. If abortion was ever made illegal under all circumstances a dramatically increased number of deliveries would end fatally for the pregnant woman. Fortunately, even under strict legislation declaring the successful attempt of abortion a felony there was an exception made in respect to “an abortion procured or attempted by medical advice for the purpose of saving the life of the mother” (Hickey, 1999).

The intended outcome of prohibiting abortions was not entirely to deprive women of liberty, even though that was the result. The laws did hold the value of life in high regard and did not want abortion to be looked upon as “an easy way out.” However, even if it means doing it themselves or going to an illegitimate establishment those determined enough will find the means to terminate their pregnancy. A desperate teenager is not concerned with the law. All a young girl wants at the discovery of an accidental

pregnancy is a solution, preferably the quickest and most accessible. Whether the escape from the situation is legal or illegal does not make one bit of difference when truly faced with the dilemma of preventing motherhood after the damage has been done.

The debate sets two of life's guarantees against each other: the right of life and liberty. Anti-abortion advocates support the right of the unborn human to get the chance to experience life. Pro-choice activists retaliate by sticking by the mother's liberties to choose the fate of one's own body. Both sides have a strong following since abortion is not the answer for everyone. When it comes down to it the reality of terminating a pregnancy might be too much for a person to handle. The pro-choice argument does not state that abortion is the best decision in every circumstance. However, the anti-abortion party takes the stance that going through with the pregnancy in every instance, except when the mother faces life threatening obstacles, is the morally correct course of action. As long as the option of life and liberty is equally represented the backbone of the U.S. Constitution is upheld. "While the right to live is the most basic right we know, nothing can be more devastating than a life with out liberty" (Tribe, 1993).

The outcome of removing a person (although an undeveloped beginning of a person) from inside of your body is something that leaves deep internal scars. A woman may be relieved from the responsibility of raising a child, but her conscience can be expected to be on an emotional rollercoaster. Although the body returns to its original state nothing else seems to be quite the same. A seventeen year old named Brandi shares her feelings of self doubt and confusion before having an abortion: "I kept saying to myself, 'Nothing is ever going to be the same. Everything is changed for good.' No matter the decision I made I would never become who I once was"

([www.standupgirl.com](http://www.standupgirl.com)). Undeniably, the consequences of terminating a potential life are powerful. An irreversible decision of this caliber will forever change a person's perception of the past and outlook on the future. The choice is not an easy one, but at least it is yours to make.

The attachment to the idea of a baby can be an extremely physically draining and a miserable state to get over. The term *abortion* is used so much that it loses a certain sense of seriousness in its actual definition. No one ever said giving up a baby was easy. Some people never get over the fact that they turned away a living being that was trying to grow inside of them. A testimony from Janett reveals these ever-present feelings of despair that still haunt her twelve years after the abortion: "When I woke up I knew...I felt the hollowness inside me...that the life had been taken from me. I was close to 18 years old...I am thirty now. I feel horrible about it. I live with it everyday. I killed my child. It's something I struggle with everyday" ([www.standupgirl.com](http://www.standupgirl.com)). Abortion cannot be put into flowery terms. There is no glory in the lengths a woman will go to turn back time. Neither politicians, religious leaders nor physicians are capable of making a blanket statement of praise or condemnation of the act. Only the pregnant woman can decide if undergoing the procedure is the right choice for her and the fetus she carries. Whether it is viewed as an individual or an indistinguishable extension of the mother, abortion is a Constitutional right.



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