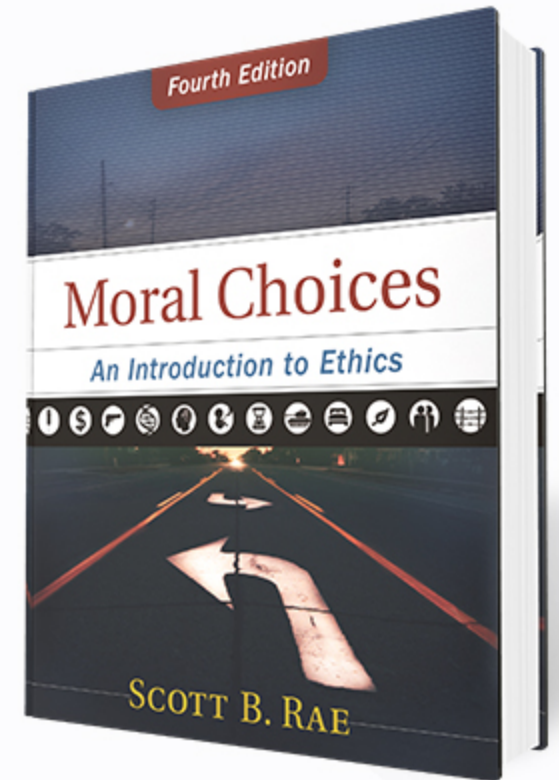


Chapter 5: Ethics at the Beginning of Life, Part 1



Introduction to Rae's approach

- Abortion
 - Legal background
 - Biblical data
 - Pro-choice arguments
 - Pro-life argument: decisive moments
- Stem Cell Research
 - Medical breakthroughs
 - Sources
 - Problems

Beginning of Life: Legal Context

- Roe v Wade (1973)
- Doe v Bolton (1973-same day **as** Roe v Wade)
- Webster v Reproductive Health Services (1989)
- Planned Parenthood v Casey (1992)
- Gonzales v Carhart (2007)

The Bible and the Beginning of Life

- The Bible never says “Thou shalt not have an abortion.” Nevertheless, abortion is sin.
 - God attributes the same characteristics to the unborn in the womb as to a person out of the womb indicating that the unborn is a person.
 - There are numerous passages that speak to the continuity of personal identity from conception to adulthood.
 - The Bible uses the concept of birth and conception interchangeably, implying that at conception a fetus is a person.

- Job 3:3 says, “Let the day perish on which I was to be born, and the night which said, ‘A boy is conceived.’”
 - This passage employs synonymous parallelism indicating that the child who was born was the same person as the boy that was conceived.
- The Hebrew term for boy is also used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to a man.
 - Ex. 10:11; Deut. 22:5
- Personal identity of children outside the womb can be traced back to the child in the womb.

- Jeremiah 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”
 - Indicates that the prophet Jeremiah was considered by God to be a person prior to his birth.
 - God knew Jeremiah in the womb, in the same way as he does a child or an adult.
 - *Rae’s Caution*: be careful not to press this into an argument for pre-existence
- The birth narrative of Christ
 - Luke applies the same Greek word for “baby” for John the Baptist in his mother’s womb (Luke 1:41-44) and to Jesus as a newborn (Luke 2:16).

Pro-Choice Arguments

- Logical Fallacies, Begging the Question
- Pro-choice advocates must assume that the fetus is not a person. But, that is what needs to be proven by pro-choice advocates.
- The question is, “Is the fetus a person or not?” How one answers that question will determine whether the pro-choice arguments are sound.
- *Lets slow down and listen more carefully*
 - What are the values of pro-choice advocates?
 - The woman’s autonomy and allowing women a larger voice as opposed to men.
 - Minimal suffering: The perceived difficulty of the mother’s life and/or the child’s life.
 - What is the desire outcome?
 - Making a difficult decision of choosing one life over another?
 - A life of thriving and minimal suffering.

- **Pro-choice Argument #1**

- “A woman has the right to do with her own body whatever she chooses.”

- **Response**

- False, that right is not absolute

- Drugs

- The fetus is not part of her body

- DNA

- Gender?

- Because it is attached does not entail that it does not have its own identity.

- If it is a person, a woman cannot murder it.

- **Pro-choice Argument #2**

- “If abortions are illegal, we will return to back alley abortions.”

- **Response**

- Assumes the fetus is not a person.

- Otherwise killing the innocent is allowable and a societal responsibility.

- Exaggerates the danger to women.

- The statistics of women who died in ‘back alley’ abortions are greatly exaggerated.

- **Pro-choice Argument #3**

- “Unwanted pregnancies will produce financial hardship.”

- **Response**

- Assumes the fetus is not a person.

- Otherwise, killing the innocent if they are a source of financial hardship is allowable.

- Confuses finding a solution with eliminating a hardship.

- The solution to unwanted pregnancies is not to eliminate them, or, to be consistent, the solution to poverty would be to exterminate the poor.

- **Pro-choice Argument #4**

- “Society should not force women to bring unwanted children into the world.”

- **Response**

- Assumes the fetus is not a person.
 - Cannot determine the worth of a person based on how much they are desired.
- If the fetus is a person it has the right to live regardless of whether or not it is wanted.
 - There is always the option of putting the child up for adoption.

- **Pro-choice Argument #5**

- “A woman should not be forced to bring handicapped children into the world.”

- **Response**

- Assumes the fetus is not a person.

- If handicapped children are persons, they have a right to life.

- Such abortions are a small number of the total.

- Even if successful, this argument would only justify a very small percentage of abortions. Not abortion on demand.

- **Pro-choice Argument #6**

- “Society should not force women who are pregnant from rape or incest to continue their pregnancies.”

- **Response**

- Assumes the fetus is not a person.
 - The conditions under which a person is conceived do not have a bearing on personhood.
- Again, such abortions are a small number of the total.
 - 1 out of 100,000 cases of rape result in a pregnancy.

- **Pro-choice Argument #7**

- “Restrictive abortions laws discriminate against the poor.”

- **Response**

- Assumes the fetus is not a person.

- Otherwise the State has a responsibility to make the taking of innocent life an equal opportunity venture.

- There is always the possibility of giving up the child for adoption.

Personhood of the Fetus

- Most philosophers agree that the fetus either has personhood at conception, or it acquires it at some point in the gestation process.
- A variety of *decisive moments* at which the fetus becomes a person have been proposed.
- None of the different decisive moments suggest any relevant change in the essence of the fetus.
- On the contrary, there is a constant process of growth and development from conception to adulthood.

- Decisive Moments
 - Viability
 - Brain development
 - Sentience
 - Birth
 - Implantation
- None of the above Decisive Moments are persuasive.

Argument for Personhood at Conception

1. An adult human being is the end result of the continuous growth of the organism from conception.
 2. From conception to adulthood, this development has no break that is relevant to the essential nature of the fetus.
 3. Therefore, one is a human person from the point of conception onward.
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Conceding the Person

- Judith Jarvis Thomson: there is no moral obligation for the mother to support the life of the unborn
 - Analogy of the kidnapped woman and violinist.
 - The fetus does not kidnap the body
 - The fetus is not a stranger
 - Pregnant women are not usually cloistered
 - A change of location does not change the obligation. (e.g., a one year old cannot survive without the mother and has a 'claim' to her)
 - The concession of personhood allows the argument that the child does have a claim on the body of the mother
- Hilde Lindemann: “calling the fetus into personhood”
 - This is a recognition of personhood not its determination.
- Infanticide

Towards a more winsome Pro-Life Argument

- Focusing on the life of the child to the *exclusion* of the mother feeds the emotional heat of these arguments. We must remember love in our pursuit of truth.
- The arguments often take the narrative of arguing about the child's life vs. the mother's life.
- These things are not mutually exclusive though politically they have been made to be.
 - Many crises pregnancies centers, e.g. *Real Options*, cares for the mother as for the child.
- The continual decline of abortions in recent decades has many contributing factors.
 - But it should be admitted that social programs addressing economic and educational disparities do correlate with a decrease in abortions.
 - The dark secret of abortion is its history and racial disparities are appalling.
- **At issue in many debates, is a modern tendency to deny suffering has any redeeming value.**

A more winsome Pro-Life Argument

- Stephanie Gray, “Abortion: From Controversy to Civility” present at Talks at Google, June 19, 2017
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzzfSq2DEc4>
 - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/google-on-abortion-3-fresh-ways-to-make-the-case-for-life/>
 - Appeal to heroic narrative of putting others ahead of oneself
 - Press into the language of abortion through the use of good questions
 - Tell stories that provide inspiration and perspective

Pastoral and Theological Considerations

- The incarnation and sacrifice of Christ
 - Human dignity is not rooted in our capacity (age, race, rationality, physical ability, etc). Rooted in our nature and especially sacred for the Son of God took on flesh.
 - Christ's incarnation redeems the full range of human life and development.
 - Jesus sacrificial life and use of his power for the sake of the weak, the sick, the vulnerable, the sinful.
- Anti-slavery arguments and anti-abortion arguments rest on the same moral grounds within scripture.
- The biblical notion of the family, father and broader community is often ignored.
- The clear and overwhelming biblical concern for the poor, marginalized, and victimized.
 - It is virtuous to care for children who are weak and vulnerable, regardless of ability or capacity.
 - We must also address poverty, education, etc. especially among minority groups.

Fetal Tissue and Stem Cells

- In 1993, the US Department of Health Services published guidelines allowing the use of fetal tissue in research if the mother consents, does not receive compensation, or has knowledge of the recipient of the tissue.
- The facilities (excepting within six states) which store this material for research can be compensated.

Opponents of fetal tissue research argue:

- (1) Abortions are not natural or accidental deaths (like in organ harvesting), but intentional.
- (2) Valid consent is impossible.
- (3) Restrictions on the purchase and sale of fetal tissue has not diminished a thriving market.
- (4) Salvaging fetal tissue 'redeems' abortion.

• Embryonic Stem Cell Research

- Stem cells are undifferentiated cells that can be directed in the lab to develop into over two hundred types of cells in the body.
 - Pluripotent: Can become any cell in the body.
 - Totipotent: Can be any organism in the body.
 - Multipotent: Limited in how they can be directed.
- Sources of Stem Cells
 - Adult stem cells
 - Embryonic stem cells

- Embryonic Stem Cells

- The embryo is destroyed in the cultivation of the stem cells.
- Only embryonic stem cells are pluripotent.
- The possibilities of stem cell research is enormous and anticipated to provide treatments for a tremendous amount of illnesses.
- If personhood begins at conception, and embryonic stem cell research results in the destruction of the fetus, then embryonic stem cell research should be banned on the grounds that the destruction of a fetus is the destruction of a person.

Case Study 5.2 (p.163), Anencephaly

- What are the primary moral issues to be resolved in this case?
- What decision will you make? If you choose to end the pregnancy, what will you tell your neighbor, who knows how you feel about abortion in general? If you choose to carry the pregnancy to term, what will you tell your doctor, who insists that you are carrying a terminally ill child who will die shortly after birth, and you are subjecting yourself to unnecessary risks and emotional heartache?
- Your physician suggest that ending the pregnancy is parallel to turning off life support from terminally ill patents who are going to die very soon because keeping the person on life support is futile. He argues that your womb is the equivalent of a life support system for the baby and you are simply turning if off because the child will be born with a terminal illness. Do you agree with your doctor's reasoning? Why or why not?