

## PHIL 1110 ASSIGNMENT 3

### Question

**Was Marissa's abortion morally permissible or morally wrong? In answering this question, be sure to explain her case, an argument from the readings for why her abortion was wrong; an argument from the readings for why it was not morally wrong; and your favored argument on this issue. Be sure to consider a criticism of your favored argument and respond to it.**

### Answer

Marissa and her husband Don are in their late thirties. They run a small prosperous business. Marissa becomes pregnant for the first time. She learns through medical tests that the child she is carrying is having Down's syndrome. This means that the child is likely to have mentally slow than other children or is most likely to have a number of physical illnesses. While Marissa wants a healthy baby and wants to terminate the pregnancy, her husband is initially against the having the abortion. He believes that they will be able to raise the child. Marissa points out they will lose their house and their savings in the process. Even after doing all that it will not be enough as the child will require continuous support for the rest of their lives. It will tear their relationship and that is why they go ahead with the abortion (Findler, et al. 165).

There are several moral reasons that show that abortion is wrong. One of them is listed below:

Noonan's argument: According to Noonan humans are endowed with human genetic code. At the time of conception, fetus acquires the human genetic code. They are humans at the time of conception. As they are humans, they have the moral rights including the right to live. Abortion extinguishes this right to live and is therefore morally wrong (Findler, et al. 169).

While this argument seems plausible, it can be challenged. According to the first premise because the fetus has a human genetic code (DNA) it is human. This premise can be challenged on two grounds. Firstly, every seed shares the DNA of the tree it grows into, but that does not mean that the seed is a tree. It only means that the seed has the **potential** to become the tree. Similarly, there is a medical procedure called xenotransplantation in which the organs of an animal are transplanted into a human being. According to Noonan's argument, once such a

transplant took place the person would cease to be human as his/her DNA would also contain the DNA of the animal whose organs were harvested (Findler, et al. 171).

Thus, Noonan's genetic code argument is not convincing enough as having a human DNA is not proof of being human.

There are several reasons that show that abortion is morally acceptable. One of them is as follows:

A fetus is not fully developed at 16 weeks of pregnancy, its organs are still under development, it is not conscious and it is not likely to feel pain (Findler, et al. 166-67). Therefore, it does not have a right to live as it is not human. Secondly, "A woman has a moral right to control what happens in and to her body, provided she does not violate anyone else's rights" (Findler et al. 185). As abortion does not violate any one's rights a woman can have an abortion, because she alone has the right to her body. In Marissa and Don's case the pregnancy is 16 weeks old and they can have an abortion and it would be morally acceptable to do so.

Moreover, this argument need not be limited only to a fetus at 16 weeks but even beyond that by combining the rationality criterion and the sentience principle.

According to rationality criterion a rational person is one who has communication and problem solving skills. A fetus does have any rationality and therefore it is morally permissible to have an abortion (Findler et al. 185).

Furthermore, sentience means the ability to experience joy and feel the pain. A sentient being is conscious and able to feel pleasure and pain. Sentient beings are aware that they are being harmed. Recent research has suggested that even at 24 weeks of gestation, the cortex that holds the pain receptors are not fully formed and therefore the fetus is not sentient. Furthermore, it is believed that fetus never experience wakefulness, they are in an unconscious, sedated state *in utero* (Findler et al. 188).

Therefore, it can be argued that abortions even upto 24 weeks are morally permissible because a. the organs of the foetus have not been formed. b. It does not have rationality and c. it is not a sentient being. Taking these factors into consideration abortion is morally permissible especially considering the fact that Marissa's baby would never lead a normal, healthy life

This argument can be challenged that on the grounds that women can have abortions on trivial grounds. Even a healthy, normal fetus that can grow up to be a normal, intelligent human being can be aborted just because the mother wishes to do so (Findler et al. 190).

I am in favour of abortion being morally permissible and I am convinced with the above argument, which says that fetus are not humans in the first place, they are not rational or sentient and therefore they can be aborted. The most clinching part of the argument to me is that it is the **mother's decision alone to decided what happens to and in her body** (Findler et al. 185). Therefore, I support abortion.

Furthermore, I believe that most abortion debates centre around the abortion issue and do not focus on the rearing up of the child. This is a commitment for a lifetime. In Marissa's and Don's case Marissa clearly spells out what will happen to them if they had the child. They will lose the house; they will lose their saving and their business will be compromised because one person will have to be completely occupied in taking care of the child for rest of their child. This is a huge burden. Even rearing healthy children is a financial and emotional burden to parents let alone a child with severe debilities. As abortion protects the finances and the state of mind of the parents and safe-guards their future then it should be morally permissible to do so.

This objection can be challenged on the grounds that even a healthy child can be aborted on the grounds financial and emotional burden to parent in rearing the child.

To counter this objection, I would say that it is the decision of the parents and more particularly the woman who has the last say. If the parents and the mother believe that they are incapable of rearing the child because of either financial or emotional incompetence then they should do so. This is because they have a moral responsibility to raise a healthy child and provide her with opportunities to flourish and grow. If **they (parents and /or the mother)** feel that they do not have these abilities, it is morally permissible for them to abort even a healthy baby.

This paper discussed the whether it is morally permissible to have an abortion. It presented arguments for and against abortion. Finally, I believe it is the decision only the parents and more particularly the mother to take on whether to have an abortion and it is morally permissible to do so.

### **Works Cited**

Findler, Patrick, et al. *Debating Health Care Ethics: Canadian Contexts*. 2nd ed., Canadian Scholars' P, 2019.

