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Cooperative Viewpoint Project: Abortion

Definition:

Abortion is a procedure that allows pregnancy to be terminated before the child is born. In the United States, the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 prohibits states from banning or restricting abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy. In the second and third trimesters, regulation is allowed ("Background of the Issue – Abortion").

Controversy:

The controversy surrounding abortion has to do with people's moral beliefs. Those who are "pro-choice" (in favor of legal abortion) generally believe that it is a woman's right to choose what happens to her body. They also argue that pregnant women will still resort to unsafe illegal abortions if legal options are not available. Some in the pro-choice movement advocate for unrestricted access to abortion, while others only support it as a last resort. Those who are "pro-life" (against abortion) generally believe that human life begins at conception and abortion is a form of murder. Some oppose abortion under any circumstances, while others make an allowance in the case of rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life ("Background of the Issue – Abortion").

Reasons for Topic Selection:

I selected abortion as my topic because it is a very controversial topic that many people have strong opinions about. Because it is so morally divisive, people tend to avoid the topic, and when it is brought up people tend to get very passionate about it. I wanted to have a discussion about it that was civil and reflective. I also chose it because I know people who disagree with me on it, so it was easy to find somebody to discuss the different viewpoints with without having to survey people to see if they disagreed with me first.

My Position and Premise:

My position is that a woman has a right to choose what happens to her body. I believe abortion should be legal in the first trimester, more carefully regulated in the second, and should only happen in the third trimester in case of danger to the woman's life. Also, abortion should especially be allowed in the case of rape and incest. Because of these beliefs, I am satisfied with *Roe v. Wade* as a federal law.

I also believe that easy access to safe abortion clinics is a woman's right. Without legal access to safe abortion clinics, women will turn to illegal, unsafe options that endanger the mother. When considering the life of the fetus versus the life of the child, the woman's life is more important. She has already developed relationships, connections, and a place in the world on top of her continued potential as a human being. Furthermore, not only can women die from unsafe abortions or from not being allowed an abortion, being forced to carry a baby to term can seriously impact the life of the woman in a negative manner. For example, having a baby can force a person onto welfare for a very long time, which also creates a drain on society.

However, abortion should not be done without serious forethought and consideration of alternatives. Extensive sexual education and access to quality contraceptives should be emphasized far more than abortion as an option for controlling pregnancies.

Lessons and Shifts in Perspective:

One of the things that really struck me during the discussion is that it is really difficult to define when a human is a human and what makes humans valuable. Everything is based on belief or faith, and can be fairly arbitrary. I realized that I tend to avoid that aspect of the abortion argument, because it is so difficult to deal with and sometimes there are no firmly logical answers. My viewpoint comes from practical concerns regarding female autonomy, women's health, and effects of unplanned children on society. I think I can have this viewpoint because I am not very religious, though I am not sure if my practical beliefs influenced my decision to renounce Christianity, or if it was the other way around.

Because of my avoidance of the difficult aspects of the abortion issue, it took me a while to formulate opinions or explain why I felt the way I did. In some cases, I didn't have an argument to counter the other side. I understand why people are against abortion, because if you come from the belief that unique human DNA that has the potential to turn into a new human not only contains human life but personhood, then abortion really is murder of the weak and defenseless. I personally don't believe personhood begins at conception, over the course of discussion I actually realized that I believed more along the lines that the development of the nervous system was the beginning of personhood.

Issues:

The first major issue was the idea of personhood. At what stage does a person become a person? If personhood begins at conception, then not only is abortion murder, the US government has a constitutional mandate to protect the defenseless unborn person. The second major issue regarded religious and spiritual beliefs about the value of humans and where to place it. Do fetuses have the same value as adults? The third major issue was the validity of using contraceptives as a preventative measure. Basically, are hormonal contraceptives really any better than abortion.

Commonplaces:

We agreed that the issue of the morality and constitutionality of abortion comes down to a difference between ideology/spiritual beliefs, making it very difficult to make concrete arguments. We also found a commonplace in the belief that life should be protected, though we disagreed about when and how. Another commonplace was that we both believe that abortion is not a very good option, though we disagreed on how much it should be avoided because of our differing moral viewpoints.

My Argument on the Issues:

The issue of personhood is difficult to argue because it all comes down to beliefs. If we equate personhood with manifesting a soul, many Christians believe personhood begins at the time of conception, when two separate sources of DNA combine to create a unique sequence of DNA that might one day grow into a unique human being. However, it must also be possible that the human soul resides more in the nervous system and brain than the DNA. In this argument, personhood doesn't begin until the nervous system starts to develop, which is well after conception (Henriques).

If humans are exceptional and valuable because of a soul, then each human immediately gains the same level of value as others when the soul enters the body, whenever that is. However, if humans are exceptional because of the ability to be self aware and to justify, which resides in the nervous system and brain, then humans gain value as they grow older and become more mentally developed. In this argument, current abilities and relationships to others hold more value than the potential humans have. Following this, zygotes, embryos, and fetuses are less valuable than the mother and don't really gain value until the baby begins to be able to be aware of itself and surroundings. Arguably, this point begins with the development of the nervous system and brain (Henriques).

For those who believe that personhood begins with conception, all forms of hormonal birth control are abortion. However, preventative measures still prevent the use of more invasive procedures against more fully formed fetuses. Furthermore, statistics show that abortions occur in equal numbers whether they are legal or not, the only difference being the illegal options are generally unsafe. What lowers the statistics of later abortions is access to quality contraceptives, which thereby save lives and allows for greater female autonomy (Deschner).

Works Cited

"Background of the Issue - Abortion." *ProCon.org*. ProCon.org, 6 Mar. 2016. Web. 18 Oct. 2016.

Deschner, Amy, and Susan A. Cohen. "Contraceptive Use Is Key to Reducing Abortion Worldwide." *Guttmacher Policy Review*. Guttmacher Institute, 1 Oct. 2003. Web. 19 Oct. 2016.

Henriques, Gregg, Ph.D. "When Does "It" Become a Person?" *Psychology Today*. Sussex Publisher, LLC, 9 Aug. 2015. Web. 19 Oct. 2016.