

The Perception of Abortion

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*Boy! What a
stupid opening sentence!*

In my attempts to come to a conclusion about the abortion issue, I found myself trying to come up with universal truths, universal definitions, and universal solutions that would convince everyone that my stand on the subject was singularly intelligent. I think that these misguided yearnings are born of too many five-paragraph "introduction, body, and conclusion" essays written with the idea that in seven hundred words or less I could solve the problems of the world. As I thought, I realized that I am not the only one who is working under the delusion that what works for one will work for everybody.

guy

I have read and listened to arguments on abortion from both ends of the spectrum and have found myself agreeing with elements of both. I believe that both arguments have elements of truth because I believe that everything we do is governed by personal perception. I hope to define this perception and this philosophy in this paper, to illustrate how diverse perceptions can be, and then go on to prove that assigning universal laws and truths to the abortion issue is illogical.

guy

ok

To begin with, let me explain what I mean by the word "universal." The American Heritage Dictionary defines a universal as being "a term or concept considered to be absolute." Therefore, according to this definition, the idea that "life is sacred," in order to be considered universal, would have to be accepted and practiced by everyone. Furthermore, by passing a universal law that stated that aborting a fetus was killing a human, a government would be asking a nation to universally accept a belief which is based entirely on personal perception.

well said

Like the existence of God, there has been no conclusive evidence, scientific or otherwise, that has been able to convince everyone that a fetus is a human being. Realizing the lack of evidence that points to the existence of a Creator, the government has granted us the freedom of religion. How then, considering the same lack of evidence for fetal humanity, could a government hope to make a universal ruling about abortion?

Great question

Statements such as, "Aborting a fetus is taking a human life," and "All life is sacred," are making the assumptions that fetal humanity and life's sanctity are universally accepted notions. I disagree. I believe that abstract concepts such as these are made acceptable only through personal perception.

Now that I have used the phrase "personal perception" three times in this paper, I shall attempt to define it and the philosophy behind it. Mind, this is the first time that I have attempted to formalize this philosophy of life, let alone put it into words.

I believe that everything that we do, think, feel, say, etc. in life is guided by our perception of the situation. Reality, or the state of truth, in each person's life is governed by how each person perceives things.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the act of perceiving as "the ability to become aware directly through the senses or to become aware of and understand in one's mind." Therefore, a tree becomes reality to me because I can see it and, consequently, perceive it. If I were to close my eyes, the tree would still remain a reality because I could imagine it; I would know that it was there.

However, a remote religion's counterpart of Christianity's Hell would not be a reality to me since I cannot perceive it. I cannot see, hear, touch, taste, or smell it, nor have I learned about it or experienced it in order to imagine it. Because of this, it is not a reality to me and I cannot act upon it or shape my life around it.

This does not mean that this hell would not exist for someone else. Like the concept of God, a person does not have to come in physical contact with something to make it a reality. Like the example of the tree, above, if I can imagine something, it becomes real. By "real" I do not wish to imply that everything real is literally there in existence. I can perceive a ghost because I can imagine it; so it becomes real. However, part of the reality of that ghost is the belief that things like that do not exist outside of the imagination.

yes, indeed

It is also possible for two people to perceive the existence of something, accept it's reality, and yet come to very different conclusions about that reality because of the basic differences on which they are basing their perceptions.

As an example: My father, a high school teacher, had a boy in class named Kevin who had been totally blind since birth. One day, while chatting, my father made the assumption that Kevin would have no perception of the concept of color. On the contrary, my father found out that Kevin had a very vivid perception of colors. He simply had to rely on other's descriptions, and emotional associations rather than his ability to see to formulate his perception.

Who is to say who's was the "right" perception? Each person accepted the reality of color but in a different way.

With regard to abortion, a person does not have to see a fetus in order to believe that it is a human, i.e., a being that is capable of thinking and communicating and interacting meaningfully with other humans. (My threadbare definition of "human" proves that the concept of humanity is based upon personal perception. I used to interact meaningfully with my horse and, thus, I guess you could say she falls into the category of being human.)

article in quotes

As Sisselå Bok points out in paragraph eight in "Who Shall Count As Human," modern technology has made it possible for us to see the fetus. For some, this is all that they need in order to perceive the fetus as a human being. Still others can see pictures and listen to reports, and still not be able to accept the reality of fetal humanity. To them a human baby is something that has to be felt, and held, and interacted with.

Many arguments are based on the "universal" that states that "life is sacred." How can this statement be held to be absolute? I do not believe that all life can be said to be sacred. This would require that everyone would agree that all life is sacred.

If my mother and a total stranger were in extreme peril and I could only save the life of one of them, I would, undoubtably, save the life of my mother. The definition of sanctity includes the element of reverence and respect. By allowing the stranger to die, I am showing no respect for his life, consequently I am denying the sanctity of his life, and in doing so, I have destroyed the absolute.

If a mother must abort or die, a decision must be made to save one or the other and, thereby, deny the sanctity of one life. If no one makes a decision between the two lives in order to avoid this conflict, both may die and the same results will be reached.

gone Jonathan Glover, in "Abortion Reconsidered," discusses the problems of determining a "worthwhile life." According to my example of my mother and the stranger, I will consider my mother's life to be more worthwhile. Since she is more integral to my reality than the stranger is, I will deem her more worthwhile. The stranger's wife, however, may believe the opposite. Who can say which one of us is correct? Would the potential contributions for society made by the fetus outweigh the emotional attachments the mother might have with loved ones? The answer depends entirely upon who you ask. Unless we can receive an objective answer from an absolute, superior being, I do not believe that absolutes can be made.

I think that such an objective judgement is called for in determining if "man is superior to the animals." This statement has been used in defence of abortion, i.e., that Man is superior and has the right to decide to kill. It has also been used against abortion, i.e., that man is superior and thus above the killing that goes on in the animal kingdom.

Asking a man if Man is superior is like asking a baseball team member which team is best. Unless, his perception of the team is negative for one reason or the other, he will no doubt say that his team is the best. I cannot accept the idea that Man can be the absolute judge as to whether Man is superior.

Not only do people perceptions differ, people tend to act inconsistently with these perceptions. Bok, in "Who Shall Count As Human?", brings up a subject in paragraph sixteen that I have heard argued before and with which I heartily agree: Some individuals maintain that a fetus is a human being and therefore should be treated with reverence.

True - good point

Two words

When a woman has an abortion, these individuals are up in arms and shouting injustice. However, when a woman has a miscarriage, which Bok defines as a "spontaneous abortion", the same individuals pass off the event with, "That's ^{all} alright, dear. You'll have another." These are the same individuals who perceive life to be sacred who will show no reverence for life whatsoever as they toss the results of the miscarriage into an incinerator or a garbage bin. No little coffins are made. No funerals are attended.

By basing my argument upon the idea of personal perception, I am by no means advocating a philosophy that advocates doing anything and everything that a person deems as right. I am no nihilist. However, I have difficulty with arguments that are based on such statements as "life is sacred" and "a fetus is a human." Until an all-powerful, unearthly being deems one definition to be the correct one, such statements can always be refuted by personal perception according to my philosophy. And since I do not believe that we have the right to say who's perceptions are correct, asking us to believe absolutes with regards to abortion is like telling us to believe in a certain god.

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oh

This is a fine paper. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

A