

Abortion Rights

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PHI 208 Ethics and Moral Reasoning

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## ABORTION RIGHTS

*Example 1 (see below for another example that takes up a different question and different point of view):*

### Abortion Rights

Should abortions be allowed in certain specific cases, such as when the mother's life is at risk, but not in other cases?

#### Introduction:

Since Roe vs. Wade struck down state laws banning abortion in 1971, the topic of abortion has been perhaps the most consistently divisive issue in the United States. According to the Center for Disease Control (2012), an "abortion" is "an intervention performed by a licensed clinician (e.g., a physician, nurse-midwife, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant) that is intended to terminate an ongoing pregnancy" (para. 2). Moreover, this is an issue that affects on average well over a million women a year, according to the Center for Disease Control's (2014) statistics on women who either have an abortion or an unwanted pregnancy. Abortions may be performed to save a mother's life, because the mother did not intend to become pregnant and does not want the child, because having the child would bring severe hardship, and for countless other reasons as well. This makes the issue quite complicated and complex, which partly accounts for its divisiveness as well as the need to consider the ethical dimensions carefully and thoughtfully. In this essay, I will focus on cases in which continuing with a pregnancy would put a pregnant woman's life in danger, and whether abortions in those cases should be regarded as morally different than ones in which her life is not at abnormal risk.

#### Position Statement:

A human fetus has equal dignity to other humans, and thus it should only be permissible to intentionally kill it when the mother's life is at risk.

#### Supporting Reason:

Human societies throughout history have often failed to recognize the full dignity of other human beings as equal "persons" or to care for the weakest and most vulnerable, and thus we should avoid making that same mistake with fetuses by applying the same laws against intentional killing to them that we would to any other human being. However, when protecting the life of the fetus means the mother's life will be in severe danger, and they cannot both be saved, it wouldn't necessarily violate the dignity of the fetus to abort it.

#### Opposing Reason:

Even though abortion involves taking the life of a biologically human creature, it lacks the kind of self-understanding or self-awareness that we sometimes associate with personhood, and its total dependency on another person's body for life means it lacks the independence we also associate with personhood.

## References

Center for Disease Control. (2012). CDCs Abortion Surveillance System FAQs. Retrieved from  
[http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/data\\_stats/Abortion.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/data_stats/Abortion.htm)

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[http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/Data\\_Stats/index.htm#Abortion](http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/Data_Stats/index.htm#Abortion)

Reagan, L. (1997). When abortion was a crime: women, medicine, and law in the United States, 1867-1973. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

World Health Organization. (2007). Unsafe abortion: global and regional estimates of the incidence of unsafe abortion and associated mortality in 2003. -- 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO Publications.

*Example 2:*

### Abortion Rights

Is restricting abortion rights an unjust restriction on a woman's right to make her own reproductive choices?

Introduction:

Since Roe vs. Wade struck down state laws banning abortion in 1971, the topic of abortion has been perhaps the most consistently divisive issue in the United States. According to the Center for Disease Control (2012), an "abortion" is "an intervention performed by a licensed clinician (e.g., a physician, nurse-midwife, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant) that is intended to terminate an ongoing pregnancy" (para. 2). Moreover, this is an issue that affects on average well over a million women a year, according to the Center for Disease Control's (2014) statistics on women who either have an abortion or an unwanted pregnancy. Abortions may be performed to save a mother's life, because the mother did not intend to become pregnant and does not want the child, because having the child would bring severe hardship, and for countless other reasons as well. This makes the issue quite complicated and complex, which partly accounts for its divisiveness as well as the need to consider the ethical dimensions carefully and thoughtfully. In this essay, I will consider the rights women have to self-determination, especially concerning reproduction, and how those rights pertain to the legal procurement of abortion.

Position Statement:

A pregnant woman has the right to determine for herself whether or not continuing a pregnancy would present severe enough burdens to make having an abortion a moral decision.

#### Supporting Reason:

Most people, even those who think abortion is wrong or that a fetus has a right to life, recognize that there might be circumstances in which aborting a fetus can be justified. However, every woman's circumstances are different, and thus only the pregnant woman herself can judge how carrying a child to term would affect her life. Moreover, we almost always recognize that a woman should have the right to determine for herself whether to *get* pregnant in the first place, which might suggest that the same consideration would seem to apply to the choice as to whether to continue a pregnancy.

#### Opposing Reason:

Rights of self-determination normally must not be exercised in a way that violates the basic rights of other people, even when a certain decision might relieve burdens. For example, we don't allow women to determine whether a child that has been born should continue living, which might raise worries about why she should be able to make that determination simply because the fetus has not yet been born.

## References

Center for Disease Control. (2012). CDCs Abortion Surveillance System FAQs. Retrieved from  
[http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/data\\_stats/Abortion.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/data_stats/Abortion.htm)

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Reagan, L. (1997). When abortion was a crime: women, medicine, and law in the United States, 1867-1973. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

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