

The Abortion Dilemma Through the Lens of Value Pluralism

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Abstract: The issue of abortion has been a matter of long-standing philosophical debate. With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the US Federal Supreme Court, the certainty of a legal solution to the issue has been further eroded, while provoking more intense debate. Based on Isaiah Berlin's value pluralism, this article analyses the various perspectives on abortion, arguing that the construction of a one-and-done doctrine should be abandoned, while revealing that "no harm to the innocent" should be a foundational value in the abortion issue, suggesting that women have an absolute right to abortion at any stage of their lives. The right to abortion is not an absolute right at any stage of a woman's life. It is a legal right that should be reasonably limited in order to achieve a relatively good legal solution.

Keywords: abortion, value pluralism, ethical analysis

1. Introduction

The issue of abortion has once again become a hot topic with the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the US Federal Supreme Court. As an ancient ethical issue, Western philosophers and ethicists as well as theologians and feminists have put forward numerous competing arguments around it. This has to do with the moral complexity of the abortion issue itself. Standing behind the plurality of views is a plurality of values, which leads to instability in policy, makes it difficult for the population to foresee the development of the law and increases distrust of the law.

In essence, an important source of human suffering is the suppression and subjugation of difference by the unity of reason, not the absence of sufficient reason. In order to reconcile the many perspectives, Isaiah Berlin's pluralism of values is of great importance. He stresses that we should counter rational monism with pluralism, discover the foundational values that humans should share, reject the use of non-foundational values to construct a one-size-fits-all system, and respect the rationality of diversity. Using this perspective, one may be able to give a better explanation after sorting out the various perspectives. This article attempts to explain the legitimacy and methods of applying a value pluralist perspective to the issue of abortion by clarifying the basic views of value pluralism and the various schools of thought on abortion.

2. An Overview of Value Pluralism

2.1. Sources and Connotations of Value Pluralism

Isaiah Berlin is one of the most important thinkers of the 20th century, and his research on the history of ideas has given him a unique vision and judgement. Among them, value pluralism is one of his

most important propositions. He argued that there are many different ultimate values in the world of human life, often incompatible and incompatible with each other, and that they can be in serious conflict, leading to some irreparable loss. As Joseph Raz says: “Moral pluralism is the view that there are various forms and styles of life which exemplify different virtues, and which are incompatible [1].” “Monism and the belief in a single standard, whether for reason or for emotions, is often a source of profound satisfaction. Thus, it has a strong appeal to people, but such false beliefs often cause great human catastrophes in moral and political practice [2].” The tragic tragedies of 20th century totalitarianism provide strong empirical evidence for Berlin’s assertion. Thus, Berlin repeatedly admonishes us to resist the temptation of metaphysical monism and to defend and embrace pluralistic values with a liberal and tolerant attitude. At the same time, he is keenly aware that people have to make choices and sacrifices in the conflict between different ultimate values. In comparing the conflict between monist and pluralist values, Berlin sees the former as more dangerous.

2.2. The Dilemma of Value Pluralism and the Solution

However, value pluralism also faces a number of dilemmas. The first includes the question that it will lead to value relativism. The reason why value relativism is so loathed and avoided is that it magnifies the relative and subjective nature of values in absolute terms, assuming that all values are the product of a particular culture or perspective. And that they are only valid in relation to a particular situation. This is tantamount to a fundamental removal of the rational basis for the existence of value, and a move towards value nihilism. Similarly, how can the double dilemma in Berlin’s theory be avoided? These are the questions facing value pluralism.

One of Berlin’s arguments against relativism is his firm belief in the existence of “The Common Human Horizon”. Berlin believed that the values people hold to common human nature have a significant common basis. Another reason is his conviction that human beings have the ability to intuitively grasp the value pursuits of the Other. Although people’s values are different and incommensurable and incompatible. But Berlin still believed that “members of one culture can understand and enter the minds of, and sympathise with, those of another” [3]. Berlin distinguishes his idea of value pluralism from relativism by the ‘common horizon of humanity’. This suggests that humanly constructed values have boundaries and a minimum of variety, and that the different beliefs and values held by people can be communicated and understood by each other. In other words, Berlin’s ‘The Common Human Horizon’ makes relativism wrong in both a cognitive and an ethical sense [4].

An important understanding, not explicitly stated by Berlin himself but implicit in his thinking, is that there is a hierarchy among the various value pursuits cherished by human beings. There are certain values that guarantee the basic characteristics of what it means to be human, and these are the basic values that all human societies recognise as common to all human beings. On top of this, different national cultures have their own value pursuits, which are different and diverse and should be respected. In his seemingly contradictory view, Berlin in fact recognises both the unity and the diversity of values [5].

Similarly, as John Gray writes on the last page of *The Two Faces of Liberalism* “The task of political philosophy is not to give practice a foundation. The aim of political philosophy is to return to practice with fewer illusions [6]. “ Thus, conflicts between values that are unjustifiable on an abstract level have the potential for reconciliation in a practical form. It is time to look beyond the abstract theoretical to the real and concrete moral and political life, i.e. to abandon the once-and-for-all foundationalism solution and to approach social and political life with an open mind. This paper therefore attempts to respond to the long-standing debate on abortion based on this anti-foundationalism approach.

3. Ethical Analysis of the Abortion Issue

3.1. The Legitimacy of Applying a Value Pluralist Perspective to the Issue of Abortion

The issue of abortion has once again been brought to the forefront with the overturning of *Roe v Wade* by the US Federal Court. The issue of abortion has been debated for a long time and there are many different opinions. Various views have been criticised and attacked to such an extent that it has been difficult to reach a consensus in reality, and the public's need for legal stability has not been met, causing many problems. Value pluralism, on the other hand, has always called for the abandonment of monolithic interpretative solutions and for efforts to reach a better outcome on fundamental values through the negotiation of various groups. This holistic and dispassionate vision can give a more pragmatic response to the abortion issue.

3.2. The Basic Methodological Embodiment of Value Pluralism in the Issue of Abortion

The issue of abortion is an important and highly controversial part of the ethical debate in contemporary Western scholarship, and it concerns the choice of different moral values. It is largely a moral dilemma of paradoxical proportions. Simply applying the principles of normative ethics to guide practical issues does not allow for the reconciliation of controversial dilemmas and provide operational solutions. Different subjects each have their own interests, and, in the light of value pluralism, they are not commensurable at the abstract level. "In ethics, there is no single correct and unified theoretical principle that can solve all ethical and moral problems once and for all; ethical principles and concrete moral situations are always in an interactive relationship [7]."

Therefore, the construction of some kind of once-and-for-all theory should be abandoned, and instead discover the "The Common Human Horizon" that we should share as human beings from the arguments of various schools of thought. In practice, we are actively identifying the value and impact of various abortion options in practice and making adjustments.

3.3. An Analysis of the Different Perspectives on Abortion

The author categorises the current views on abortion as follows: one that emphasises the woman's bodily autonomy, another that considers the 'sanctity of foetal life', and a middle ground between the two: abortion should not be severely restricted, but it should be reasonably limited for extreme reasons.

The first argument is that, firstly, a ban on abortion would threaten women's right to life. Throughout history, women have been dominated for too long, with excessive childbearing taking a heavy toll on their health and women dying from unwanted births. Women have struggled for safe and legal contraception and abortion. According to the World Health Organization, more than 200,000 women die each year because they do not have access to a safe abortion. By banning abortion, all abortions will have to go underground, which will result in a large number of women contracting diseases and even being involved in other illegal trades such as the sale of organs due to the lack of access to a safe abortion. Secondly, banning abortion violates a woman's right to reproductive freedom. If a woman does not want to have a baby at all, but has to because she cannot have an abortion, this is absolute torture for her. However, the torture has just begun. If she is unable to provide for the child, she faces the enormous and lasting pain of giving up her own child. Childbearing should be a woman's right, and women should be free to control their own bodies, they are not instruments of childbearing. Women therefore have the autonomous right to choose to have or not to have children. When the safety of the mother's life is seriously threatened by the presence of the foetus, the foetus can only be denied the right to life in order to safeguard the mother's right to life. This is the main reason why therapeutic abortion is universally accepted. In addition, banning abortion reduces women's opportunities to participate fully and equally in the political, social and

economic life of the country, undermines women's ability to balance work and family in the workplace, and has a significant impact on women's education, labour force participation, careers, earnings and security [8].

The second view is that the foetus has a full right to life and can be called a human being. Therefore, abortion is immoral at all times and under all circumstances. Its logical form is as follows: Major premise: it is wrong to kill an innocent human being; Minor premise: the foetus is an innocent human being; Conclusion: it is wrong to kill the foetus [9]. The specific reasons can be broadly summarised as follows: first, life begins at the moment of maternal conception, and the foetus has a full right to life at that point, which cannot be taken away at will. This view that the foetus has a full right to life is strongly influenced by religious beliefs. For example, Catholicism and Islam believe that life is given by God and that only God has the right to take human life, and that humans are not allowed to take it without permission. This belief is still strong in some countries where Catholicism is practised. The Catholic Church believes that because the foetus has the full right to life, they are innocent and should not be punished by death. Even if the pregnancy is the result of rape, the mother cannot have an abortion. There are many countries that still hold to this view and criminalise abortion. Both the person requesting the abortion and the surgeon may be sentenced to prison for it. Secondly, in addition to religious reasons, philosophy also provides avenues for arguing for the sanctity of life. Some theories of ethics argue that it is immoral to deprive this life of the possibility of continuing to exist and develop while it is in its unformed, very early, newly created embryonic stage. Thirdly, in most cases, a woman's pregnancy is not the result of an act such as rape, but rather the result of an intentional sexual act. A woman who seeks an abortion is in fact refusing to take responsibility for her own actions, and this irresponsibility for her own actions is essentially an expression of irresponsibility for the lives of others.

The third view on abortion recognizes that the body is a woman's property and that she is free to control her own body; however, the foetus should also have a moral status, and that the foetus has the potential to become a human being after a certain amount of time in the mother's body, and the woman does not have an absolute right to do what she wants with it.

3.4. Abortion in Value Pluralism Perspective

According to value pluralism, the solution to a serious conflict of values should be to discover the fundamental value, the "Common Human Horizon", and to arrange a real-life compromise in accordance with it. In the case of abortion, what is "The Common Human Horizon"? In my opinion, it is "to prevent harm to those who are not at fault". In the abortion process, the foetus can be considered a 'person' until it has the capacity to survive and feel independently, but not a 'person' until then. Likewise, the adult before that time is not at fault, but if he or she delays and aborts the foetus after it has acquired a degree of independent viability and sensation, he or she should be held responsible for the delay, as it is in fact disrespectful to life and cannot be considered a 'person without fault'. The following is a specific analysis.

Firstly, fetuses are potential human beings who may develop into 'persons'. The foetus expresses the value of its life in a future way. The existence and development of human beings, of societies, requires that new life is constantly being birthed and born. If adults who change their minds arbitrarily and capriciously can have an absolute right to abortion, this should be seen as disrespectful to life and should not be so.

Yet again, the survival of the foetus is entirely dependent on the mother; the foetus is only potentially human, not actually human. Although the foetus has natural attributes, it is not yet an independent entity, and its survival is still entirely dependent on the mother, i.e., the foetus does not yet have independent social relations and does not have social attributes. Moreover, in the absence of self-consciousness, the foetus does not have the same rights and values as an adult or even an infant.

This foetus, which is not in social relations and is not self-aware, is fundamentally different from a real person. Therefore, our respect for the foetus cannot be fully equated with respect for the actual human being. It is therefore important to have a clear understanding of the state of the foetus at each stage of its development. The process of foetal development is essentially a process of increasing the right to life. Medically speaking, life begins when the sperm and egg unite and form a spindle around the nucleus and the fertilised egg emerges 20 hours later, when fertilisation is terminated. However, within 2 weeks of fertilisation, the human form has not yet been formed and the embryo has very little value and right to life at this time, which is the main reason why abortions within 2 weeks are generally accepted. After 2 weeks of egg fertilisation, the human form is formed and the value and right to life of the foetus is increasing [10]. After 25 days of egg fertilisation, the heart is pumping, and a fetal ECG can be measured through the mother. After 3 months of egg fertilisation, the organs have largely differentiated and taken shape, so the transition from embryo to foetus has taken place at this time and the fetal brain has formed, through which the mother can measure the fetal electroencephalogram. The egg is fertilised between 24 and 28 weeks, when the foetus has the ability to survive independently and can survive if born prematurely. The moral value and right to life of the foetus has increased considerably. At this point, therefore, the foetus can be called a “person” and abortion at this time is not generally accepted. Although a woman has the right to control her own body, she cannot escape responsibility by delaying the exercise of this right.

Such a view may still be subject to ethical criticism and questioning, but the issue of abortion is not entirely a purely ethical one, but a social one with profound implications. And while a country’s abortion regime must be defined by law, the law is never made in search of the best solution, but rather in search of the least bad one. Using a value pluralist perspective often allows one to choose the most secure approach among the many interests at stake, rather than fantasising about seeking a 100 per cent perfect solution.

4. Conclusion

This article argues that between the right to life of the foetus and a woman’s right to make decisions about her own body, one should apply a fundamental view of value pluralism, abandoning the temptation to find monistic solutions and taking a liberal and tolerant approach to the pursuit of multiple values. It is also important to find the “The Common Human Horizon” that is embedded in this issue. In the case of abortion, the author believes that it should be a matter of “keeping people who are not at fault from being harmed”. For this reason, I oppose both the denial of a woman’s right to abortion and the absolute right to abortion at any stage of a woman’s life. The right to abortion is a legal right that should be reasonably limited. It should be exercised before the foetus grows to the point of having bodily sensations. Women cannot escape responsibility for their own delay in exercising their right to abortion, despite their right to control their own bodies.

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