

The Argument for Abortion
For PHIL 365 Biomedical Ethics
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In August, 2022, Amanda Zurawski was denied an abortion due to a trigger law banning abortion in Texas. The law states that performing an abortion is "a felony punishable by up to life in prison," that the attorney general will seek a "penalty of not less than \$100,000, plus attorney's fees," and that access to an abortion hinge on a patient facing "a life-threatening physical condition aggravated by, caused by, or arising from a pregnancy" (Kilbanoff, 2022). As doctors did not provide an abortion, Zurawski developed sepsis—She became violently ill, and friends and family believed she would die. Some of the repercussions to Amanda's health include sepsis and bacteremia—bacteremia meaning the presence of bacteria in the blood (Forrester, 2022)—all of which would lead to death. Doctors advised Amanda that it "was not a question of if [she] would lose the baby... it was a question of when" (The Meteor, 2022).

Denying Amanda Zurawski's abortion was morally incorrect as the benefits outweighed the alternatives. The principle of nonmaleficence dictates an "obligation not to inflict harm" (Jahn, 2011). The Hippocratic oath states that doctors must "prevent disease whenever [they] can, for prevention is preferable to cure" (PBS, 2022) and, as a result, corroborates the previous principle. Since the continuation of Amanda's pregnancy would end with her death and the inevitable death of her child, the lawmakers (not the doctors) that denied the abortion were morally incorrect.

Don Marquis suggests that abortion is wrong. He states that fetuses are living and human, humans have the right to live, therefore, fetuses have the right to life. He then asserts that

"women have the right to control their bodies, but the right to life overrides the right of a woman to control her own body. Therefore, abortion is wrong" (Marquis, 2022). Marquis essentially argues that it is wrong to kill adults and, therefore, wrong to kill fetuses, following up by stating that killing robs a victim of their future and potential. Marquis also argues that abortion is wrong until the most severe cases. This might be where Amanda's case falls, so Marquis and I agree that Amanda's abortion is reasonable—especially since the fetus did not have a future.

I agree more with the counterargument to Marquis' in a broad of abortion (Marquis and I may agree on Amanda's case). Strong uses Gerald Paske's viewpoint that "an even more serious loss than the loss of a possible future is the loss of the actual, existent person. It is this immediate loss of personhood which constitutes the basic harm in killing" (Strong, Paske, 2022). Strong states that Marquis' argument that it is wrong to kill because of that person's future does not account for terminally ill adults or the mentally challenged. He also argues that there are cases—like killing a young but severely impaired child or a child with a terminal illness—where the future does not exist, however, it is still seriously wrong. The "future" argument does not "adequately explain the wrongness of killing infants and young children" when they have no future.

According to the principle of autonomy, one should have the option to "think, decide, and act freely" (Gillon, 2022). Some might question whether an abortion is necessary, but by denying Amanda the right to an abortion, the lawmakers acted paternalistically, making a choice for Amanda until a physical decline in health. Preventing abortion contradicts the principle of autonomy and Mill's principle of utility. In this case, denial created a life-threatening situation; this does not promote happiness, and denying the procedure is inherently paternalistic,

contradicting the principle of autonomy. As such, there were no benefits to continuing Amanda's pregnancy other than another person's idea of righteousness.

Again, what is right by one person may not be correct by another, but if the fetus dies either way, it is best to avoid Amanda's death. The argument that abortion is murder stems from an intrinsic moral code that may or may not align with another person's code. When imposing a belief on another person, the other person loses autonomy and assumes irrationality on the part of Amanda. Nevertheless, since the doctors also agreed that Amanda should receive an abortion, one would have to consider irrationality on behalf of the doctors—the people entrusted with dictating whether or not a pregnancy is life-threatening and determining whether someone is irrational. What is right by one person may not be what is right by another.

Should new scientific evidence that an unborn fetus possesses the same self-awareness and sentience as its mother, there would be no question as to whose life should be saved. Should such evidence appear, the next step would be to evaluate whose life holds more value. This would compare a child who has not contributed to society yet but has unseen potential and a mother who has and is contributing actively to society. In this case, however, a mother's life should still be valued more than an unborn child's. Mao and Zhang write that in a mother's absence, there may be "persistent negative effects on children's development." (Mao, Zhang 2020). An unborn child does not function without its mother, but the mother will function without the child. A mother's health should always come first.

Reflection:

One thing I am still thinking about (from a purely scientific perspective, devoid of emotion) relates to the autonomy and self-awareness of a fetus. Biologically, humans are no

different from animals. We are made of the same material; we are all flesh and blood—made up of cells. But humans slaughter animals without a second thought. The rationale comes from humans being more sentient than animals—that animals do not feel the same emotions nor experience life the same way as humans. However, we do not fully comprehend how the human mind functions—we do not comprehend the functions of the brain of a worm, cow, or dolphin. How would we understand what sentience truly means when the very thing that gives us autonomy and self-awareness is not fully understood? To me, it seems presumptuous to assume that other animals do not possess the capability to experience life to the same degree as a human. We do not live in the mind of other humans, and we do not live in the minds of animals. To me, it is intriguing that some humans place so much value on the unborn offspring of other people (to the point of endangering or killing the mother), yet they choose to kill and consume animals that are independent and self-sufficient without a second thought. Nevertheless, we still kill animals regardless of whether we think it is wrong.

Maybe comparing humans to animals is a sociopathic thing, but I will always value a mother's life more than the thing growing inside her until concrete evidence shows that fetuses have more sentience, autonomy, and self-awareness than animals. My boyfriend put it well: if there was ever a choice between you and the unborn child, I would choose the woman I know and love—not the alien parasite using her body.

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