

A Different Understanding of Personhood as it relates to the Abortion Debate

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Preface and Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank Professor Elizabeth Oljar and David Koukal for their help with this project. I have looked at several different philosophers in an attempt to gain a better understanding of personhood, the soul, or what makes us human. In my search I have realized a glaring gap in the way philosophers tackle philosophical problems in overlooking the feminist perspective on many issues. I would also like to thank the University of Detroit Mercy and the Honors Program for their continual support.

Why Personhood?

Personhood is often argued to be the defining issue surrounding abortion. If the fetus is characterized as a person or a being with person like moral rights then it would presumably be immoral to harm it just as it is wrong to harm a person. Male thinkers have sought to define personhood based on abstract principles primarily based on rationality. This masculine viewpoint has been imbedded in our thinking. Proponents for and against abortion claim that it is the abstract rights of the fetus or the mother which determines the permissibility of abortion. Often the female perspective which would emphasize human relationships is ignored on what is an issue that primarily concerns women. Discussing personhood may enlighten the abortion debate but caters to the male dominated thinking society has adopted. In order to understand this male bias it is important to look at the standout thinkers which define the modern definition of personhood. Plato, Aristotle, Bentham, and Kant here all come up with defining characteristics of personhood which influences the works of contemporary thinkers such as Mary Anne Warren and Don Marquis. This thinking overshadows the female perspective in this feminist issue. Discussing personhood is important, but needs to be more broadly understood or perhaps considered relationally as it only contains half of the populations perspective and half of the truth.

Introducing Plato

Plato developed a way of thinking known as Platonism which affirmed that there are abstract concepts which exist in a different dimension or third world. These concepts are known as the forms. Objects on earth are mere shadows of the forms. In his famous Allegory of the Cave Plato explains how humans are trapped in this life without clear access or knowledge of these forms. The goal of philosophy is to discover the forms and understand them as best as possible while in this life.

In his dialogues Plato develops an image of the human soul modeled on the pursuit of the higher forms. The soul in his discussion is equivalent to the modern concept of personhood or the defining characteristics of human nature. His image of the soul relies on his understanding of the forms and the way in which humans obtain knowledge. Humans are enlightened by the forms processed by the intellect. Other philosophers who share a similar viewpoint include St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure.

Socrates' Soul: Higher Forms

Socrates in Plato's *Republic* defined a just person as one who was controlled by reason. Plato writes, "Therefore, isn't it appropriate for the rational part to rule, since it is really wise and exercises foresight on behalf of the whole soul, and for the spirited part to obey it and be its ally?" The soul or essence of a person is made up of three parts: a rational part, a spirited part, and a desirous part. The rational part, allied with the spirited part, rules the desirous part. This would be a just soul for Justice was defined by Socrates as everyone acting according to their function. In the case of the republic, it is the function of the philosopher kings to rule the warriors and laborers. Therefore it is just for the philosopher kings to rule, just as it is just for the warriors to wage war and the laborers to produce. The nature of a just society reflects human nature, where Socrates believes it is just for the rational part to rule the warrior (spirited) and laborer (desirous) parts of the soul. If justice means acting according to one's function, then the function of humans for Socrates must be to use reason to rule one's actions. This means that the essential component of human nature is rationality. Socrates and many other ancient philosophers claim that reason is what separates humans from animals and thus is what makes humans special. They tend to define human nature based on rationality. This prevails throughout the Middle Ages where human nature was consistently defined in the context of rationality.

The soul as described by Socrates corresponds to our current image of the person. Since Socrates believes the soul is comprised of the spirited, desirous, and most importantly rational parts, his image of the human person reflects this belief. For ethical considerations, this belief in the human person has several implications. First, to be a human person one has to have some amount of reason or capacity to reason. Second, this rational part should rule over a more

animalistic or desirous part. Thirdly, the rational part can either be aided or opposed by a spirited part against or in favor of the animalistic part.

Socrates' image of the human person is supported by common sense. Most human persons have a capacity to reason. We can think, imagine, extrapolate, and do many other abstract functions which aid in understanding what is good and bad for us. While we are not always correct in the exercise of our reason, the ability is there. Despite this gift we often allow our basic instincts to take hold of our reason. We know that one extra bowl of ice cream is probably not in our best interest, but sometimes our appetite overrides this rational thought in favor of sating the desire. This sounds like the one person has at least two different parts to him or her fighting against each other. Furthermore, we sometimes get angry when we see that our appetite is getting the better of our reason, which sparks our spirit to come to the aid of reason in a coupled fight against desire. This calls into question whether the human person has only two or three parts. To distinguish the spirit from reason examine the following example: a man with a well ordered soul according to Socrates often listens to his reason over desire. He does not eat in excess, drink in excess, or have too much sexual intercourse. One day he comes across a whole white chocolate raspberry cheesecake. His reason tells him to only eat a tiny piece as the dessert is not healthy. His desire tells him to eat the cheesecake. He would usually never let himself succumb to the desire, but tonight his desirous part seemingly gets angry with the rational part and overrules reason and he eats a huge piece of cheesecake. In this case the desirous part was aided by the spirited part. As proven, the spirit sometimes sides with reason, but it can also side with desire making it a distinct part of the soul.

While the spirited part of the soul is not as obvious, the other two parts namely reason and desire are apparent. We often look at people who allow their emotions and desirous to rule

them as immature, and those who control their desires with reason as mature. While perhaps not the only components of human nature, Socrates identifies an important aspect in rationality. It certainly distinguishes us from other animals as we display an enhanced ability to reason. But can this be the distinguishing trait of personhood which conveys ethical responsibility? Is the reason why we think killing another human person wrong because that human has the ability to reason?

Rationality as the Morally Significant Factor

If we assume that rationality is the ethically determining factor then we can conclude that the reason why killing an ant is not wrong or as wrong as killing another human person is because the ant cannot reason. This excludes the assumption that the ant does not reason in the same capacity as a human and that killing the ant is wrong because it imparts a precedent for killing in the person. If we look at the wrongness of killing an ant versus the wrongness of killing a chimpanzee the degree of wrongness appears to increase. This may be due to the fact that this apparent increase in wrongness stems from our own personal gut reaction between the two killings as killing a chimpanzee appears to be more graphic. But I would contend that killing a chimpanzee is more wrong than killing an ant. Is this because the chimpanzee displays a higher capacity to reason? If so, then an increasing capacity to reason conveys an increased amount of

ethical status to the individual. In the fetal debate, this would mean that as a human grows in capacity to reason then the moral responsibility towards the human increases.

There is one major problem with defining ethical responsibility in this way. It would mean that killing a chimpanzee would be worse than killing a newborn as the chimpanzee is more rational. This seems counter intuitive. It would also throw out the hope to give mentally disabled people a chance to have moral value. This means that either the assumption that killing an infant is worse than a chimpanzee is wrong or that reason is not the only factor that determines moral worth. While personhood could still be defined or characterized by rationality, this would mean the being a person and having moral worth are two different features which can be distinguished. If this is the case, then personhood can be discarded for it is the features which impart moral worth are more relevant in this discussion. Personhood must include the factors that impart moral worth. Therefore, the assumption that reason is the main component of personhood has to be discarded as the distinguishing factor for moral worth.

Introducing Aristotle

Contrary to Plato, Aristotle believed that knowledge is derived from the senses. Instead of a third world with abstract forms, the forms of objects are derived from the material world. The essence of material objects can be abstracted from the flesh. Consequently the forms have a far greater connection to the physical world. The two are intimately connected. However, Aristotle will still go on to arrive at a similar conclusion as to the state of the human soul.

Aristotle's Soul: A Progression of Shapes

Similar to Plato, Aristotle defines the distinguishing characteristic of human nature as reason or rationality; however, he arrives at his conclusion somewhat differently than Plato. To begin, Aristotle believes that to understand what a higher principle is one must first look at the objects its manifest in and then at the actions of these objects. One of his primary concerns was determining the nature of the soul. He began by separating living and non-living objects. He observed that both a rock and a person have a body or matter. Therefore, something else must be contributing to the person having a soul. He then observed that the person is seen to have a soul while he or she is alive but lacks one after death. He concluded that what makes a soul is the life-giving principle of a being. He equates this life-giving principle with a form, but not in the same sense as Plato's forms. Instead, the form is the integrally connected part of a being which holds

the matter in the correct shape for life to exist. This is drawn to the analogy of a saddle. A saddle is made from leather which is the matter or physical part of the being. The form is the shape of the leather. The leather cannot be a saddle without being held in a certain form. The form of the saddle is the soul. However, the soul cannot be drawn out of the leather, but relies upon it.

The soul of beings is the first actuality of the matter. It is what takes the potential matter (leather) and transforms it into the being (saddle). It is not some abstract concept but has a closely relational existence. The body depends on the soul to hold it in place. This is why when a person dies their body will decay because it has lost its actualizing principle. However, the soul requires the body because it cannot exist without the body. You cannot visualize the form of the saddle without the leather being there, just as you cannot visualize the soul of a person without their body.

Once soul was defined, Aristotle went on to explain the types of souls. This culminated with the description of the souls of humans. First, the most basic soul allows for the reproduction and nutrient uptake by the being. These types of souls include plant souls. The second type of soul allows for sensation and perception. This keeps progressing from locomotion to finally intellect. He equates the order of souls to a progression of shapes. Each subsequent soul adds more complexity to the last and it is this added complexity that defines the soul just as adding a side to a triangle changes the shape and redefines the triangle. It is the fourth side added that defines the square and gives it significance. Therefore, as the souls progress it is the last part of the progression which gives the soul meaning. This leaves Aristotle at the same conclusion Plato reached: that the intellect is the most important part of human nature and what separates us from other animals.

Defining Moral Characteristic (Aristotle)

Aristotle does differ from Plato in some aspects. He would be far more likely to expand the moral community. This is because of his understanding of soul. He believes that the soul is the first actualizing principle. It is the thing that forms and shapes us into being. He would argue that the acorn is the same being as the oak. The acorn has the form of the tree holding it together and shaping it into the tree it will become. The same would go for the fetus. From the point of conception, the fetus has the life giving principle which shapes the fetus into an adult. This life giving principle includes the principle of intellect which would make killing the fetus wrong as opposed to killing a plant. However, Aristotle runs into the problem of mentally challenged or inactive individuals. What is the state of their souls? If intellect is the defining moral trait of the human soul, then how could these people become members of the moral community? Either these individuals lack intellect and thus are not members of the moral community or there was some accidental change in their being which prevented them from actualizing their intellect.

Introducing Kant

The philosophy of Immanuel Kant seeks to form a balance between Plato and Aristotle. He attempts to form a unity between the empiricists such as Aristotle and those who rely on abstract concepts like Plato. He also develops a principle of Universalizability to describe moral duties. However, he will also rely on rationality as the defining moral characteristic for moral significance.

Principle of Universalizability

A third philosopher who relies on the intellect or rationality as the defining moral characteristic is Immanuel Kant. The principle of universalizability states that an act is morally acceptable if, and only if, the maxim is universalizable. The maxim is the motivation behind an action. These guide decisions and may be consciously or unconsciously formed. Therefore, when a maxim is not formed, one is not truly acting. This would include bodily movements that are not voluntary such as sneezing. This has important implications. Contrary to utilitarianism, Kant believed that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on the intentions and not the outcome. The second part of Kant's theory focuses on the definition of universalizable. If a maxim is universalizable then it has to fulfill this three part test: First, formulate the maxim clearly, stating what you intend to do and why you intend to do it. Second, imagine a world in which everyone supports and acts on this maxim. Lastly, ask, can the goal of the action be

achieved in such a world? If these three criteria can be met then the maxim is universalizable. The test is aimed at determining whether an action is consistent and fair. It is a more refined version of the common sense test “what if everyone did my action?” The main difference is less on whether the outcome of an action is disastrous and more so on not singling out oneself and making an exception. Kant gives an example on how this is the case. Consider a compulsive gambler in debt. One night the broker is going to come to collect or break his legs. This gambler then goes to a friend pleading for money with the promise of repaying the debt while secretly holding that he will not repay his friend. This action appears to be immoral from a common sense perspective. Kant would explain why it was immoral in this way: the maxim was to lie to a friend in order to avoid pain. If everyone acted on this maxim, everyone would lie when it meant the outcome would avoid pain. The goal of these people’s actions could not be achieved if no one trusted other people because they were always lying. The purpose of the gambler lying, to get the money, could not be achieved. He was making an exception of himself, and this acting immorally.

The principle of universalizability has a second formulation known as the principle of humanity. The principle of humanity states that one should always treat human being (including oneself) as an end, and never as a mere means. There are three words that need to be defined in order to fully understand this principle. Kant has a different thought behind the word human. He refers to all rational and autonomous beings, not merely *Homo sapiens*. Therefore aliens or non-human, rational beings would be included within this definition. The next two words that need to be understood are ends and means, which are related. Treating someone as an end means to treat that person with respect. Further, he states that treating someone as a means is to deal with them so that they help one achieve their goals. However, these explanations lack something and are

unsatisfactory. What is behind the difference between these two words is the importance placed on them. Kant argues that humans should be included in this category. Every human or rational being is valuable in his or her own right. Therefore they need to be treated as the final goal in all instances, not merely a lead to that goal. Contrastingly, means are things that lead to final goals. They are expendable. Humans cannot fit in this category solely as doing so would violate their intrinsic value. The principle of humanity explains why rape and slavery are intrinsically wrong. Slavery treats those under its yoke as an animal, something to be used. It does not acknowledge the rational or autonomous aspect of a human's nature. It does not treat a human as an end, but as a means. Similarly, rape is treating someone as a source of pleasure and again not as a human. The goal of the action is to gratify oneself, and fails to acknowledge the intrinsic value of the individual.

What Determines Moral Worth?

Kant again runs into the same problem as Aristotle and Plato. The fetus is neither rational nor autonomous so can it be treated merely as a means? The same goes for mentally impaired individuals. For each of these philosophers another qualification needs to be in place rather than intellect alone. While rationality may be an important part of humans and the human experience it does not tell the entire picture because there are certainly other things that help distinguish us from other animals. There is something missing else we would still feel it acceptable to throw away disfigured or deformed babies.

Utilitarian Perspective

One philosopher who distinguishes himself from the tradition of focusing on the intellect is Jeremy Bentham. Instead he believes that the rightness and wrongness of an action depends on producing the greatest amount of happiness. By happiness he is referring to pleasure being preferred to over pain. This means that members of the moral community are beings who can experience pain. Any action needs to be taken to reduce the amount of pain and maximize the amount of pleasure. This philosophy has several implications including expanding the moral community. It also has the strength of not becoming overly reliant on rationality to give people moral worth.

An Expanded Moral Community

This definition of personhood would not only include the fetus in the moral community but animals and any being which could feel pain as the fetus at some stage has this capacity. Several issues arise however. The pleasure and pain of two different beings sometimes come into conflict with each other. In every situation the maximum amount of happiness needs to be achieved. Thus it could be right to harm one individual in order to make many others supremely happy. It calls into question things like meat eating and using animals for our own gain. Killing a cow to eat a burger may make us happy but it does not take into account the lack of happiness of the cow. This seems counter intuitive as we generally see it acceptable to eat animals to maintain our body. We do not criticize the wolf when he kills the deer in order to survive, nor do we criticize ourselves when we eat a burger. We may take offense to seeing animals suffer, often times objecting to it more strongly than we do for other humans. We all are touched by the animal shelter commercials asking for our support to help a suffering animal. Yet when the animal's happiness comes in direct conflict with our own we mostly choose our happiness. This would imply that a human's happiness is more important than the animal's. Or at least that humans prefer other humans' happiness over animal happiness. In order to understand why our happiness is more important we must understand what is different about humans than animals. Is it because we in fact can be more happy than animals? This would mean that by killing an animal we do not do wrong because our happiness is more important.

If our happiness is more important than other beings there must be a reason why this is the case. Perhaps it is because we can feel more happiness. It is hard to compare the amount of happiness found in a human when he is eating ice cream as opposed to a dog that is eating ice cream. Both seem pretty happy. If happiness is the morally significant factor, perhaps humans

are given greater moral worth as opposed to a dog because it is more recognizable when humans appear happy. But this does not seem to be the case as a jumping puppy with his tail wagging is impossible to mistake for anything but happiness. Therefore, while happiness can be seen in both animals and humans, humans have some other factor which puts their happiness above animals based on natural intuition. While Bentham raises an important point part of the human experience, happiness could not be the only thing which separates humans from animals or makes them important.

Shifting Focus: Feminist Perspective

Up until this point I have considered the fetus in isolation and not its relationship with the mother. The focus of this paper so far has been to discuss personhood in relation to the fetus. However, some feminist theorists would argue that this paternalistic thinking is just a fulfillment of our male dominated society. For feminists the issue of abortion revolves around the mother and her choices. Therefore, any discussion of the personhood is irrelevant or a secondary issue at best. The primary concern of feminist arguments is that the potential mother is the best person to decide the morality of abortion because she is the one in the position and can examine all of the factors. For them there is no absolute moral rule that applies to all cases of abortion, but each

case is different and it is the mother's prerogative to make a decision. This difference reflects the types of thinking in men and women. While the male thinkers want to focus on the abstract concepts, female thinkers wish to get down to the specific issues and focus on the relational relevance or the interaction between humans. Two other concerns of feminist theorists revolve around the woman's ability to control abortion. Often it is argued that women cannot refuse a man's sexual advances because of society. This leaves women trapped with unwanted pregnancies. Women are taught to be giving, receptive, and fearful of those with power. Men on the other hand are taught to take advantage of sexual encounters and use sex as a method to convey power and authority. Even if a woman is not the victim of rape which would clearly be out of her control, she could still be victim of societal imposed 'rape'. Finally, pregnancy takes place only in female bodies and greatly affects their lives. Men are largely unaffected. Thus laws on abortion need to be examined to determine whether they contribute to the female oppression.

As a man it is easy for me to say that I understand that females bear a greater responsibility than men, but this does not mean they have the right to terminate the abortion because the fetus is potentially a person and something to be protected. This stems from my male oriented thought that universal laws can be obtained regarding the permissibility of moral actions. When confronted with feminist concerns about females being unable to refuse men's sexual advances I am also resistant to persuasion. It is impossible for me to feel what feminist writers express when detailing sexual oppression. However, I do believe that what they say is most likely true. Therefore, in my discussion of personhood I need to include these concerns as it relates to the abortion debate. I do not believe that feminist concerns of overlooking the mother do not need to clash with the fetus' personhood. The relationship between people is a central component in personhood which allows for the mother to fully participate in the abortion debate.

Modern Arguments: Don Marquis

In most non-feminist arguments against abortion the fetus is given primary concern and the female's rights are given secondary concern. Don Marquis is an opponent of abortion and claims that most abortions are immoral. His reasoning for this claim lies in the theoretical wrongness of killing in general. An underlying assumption that governs the lives of human beings is that taking the life of another human is wrong. Why is this the case? Marquis eliminates some common reasons that describe the wrongness of killing including the brutalization of the one who commits the crime or the harm it inflicts on those close to the murdered victim. Marquis asserts that the wrongness of killing another lies in the harm it does to the victim. In his view, the future is the most cherished thing an individual possesses. When a murderer kills another they rob the victim of his or her future and its value. For Marquis, what is valuable is not the change in one's biological state, but the experiences of life. For Marquis, his account of the wrongness of killing is supported by several of its implications. His theory explains why humans view killing as one of the worst crimes, meaning that the thing valued highly by humans is their future, making the taking of this a high offense. He also claims that those with AIDS or some terminal illness view this as a bad thing because they will be deprived of their future. Clearly his argument has some merit as humans would seem to value their future. He also has four supporting claims that follow from his argument. His account allows for non-human beings either from another planet or animals on earth to become part of the moral community if they are shown to have a future like humans. It is a merit to his argument that he defines the wrongness of killing another human not in a biological sense as this would exclude any sentient non-human beings. He goes on to say that the tendency to view active euthanasia as a good thing as it relieves the suffering of those dying coincides with his theory. He argues that their supposed

futures would be filled with suffering and thus they would not be losing anything. A second merit to his argument is the fact that his account allows for the wrongness of killing children or infants who also have a future. This can be applied to fetuses. Since fetuses have a clear human future Marquis argues that it directly follows from his argument that killing them is immoral in most cases.

Modern Arguments: Mary Ann Warren

Similarly, Mary Anne Warren believes that the fundamental question rests on the moral status of the fetus. Warren rejects the idea that the morality of abortion can be decided without examining the rights of the fetus and thus develops a set of qualifications to decide if a fetus is a person and in fact is entitled to the same rights as other people. She writes “I will argue that, while it is not possible to produce a satisfactory defense of a woman’s right to obtain an abortion without showing that a fetus is not a human being, in the morally relevant sense of that term, we ought not to conclude that the difficulties involved in determining whether or not a fetus is human make it impossible to produce any satisfactory solution to the problem of the moral status of abortion.” Warren attacks Thomson’s argument by developing a similar violinist story which I have brought forward involving the violinist receiving permission to be hooked up to you for nine months (Thomson gives the famous example of waking up strapped to a violinist. She believes that the natural inclination of most individuals would be to reject the assumption that

one would have to remain strapped to a dying violinist to support her life). Underneath her example, she believes that if person x brings another person y into existence out of x's own decision then x does not have the right to deny what x knew would be necessitated to sustain y that is assuming that person y has full moral rights. She agrees with me that the scenario described by Thomson would only apply to cases of rape (even though she comes to the conclusion that this proves that abortion in cases of rape is morally acceptable).

Since Warren decides that the morality of abortion does depend on the state of the fetus, she has to explain what exactly is that state. The traits of a person which Warren develops include: consciousness and the capacity to feel pain, reasoning or ability to solve problems, self-motivated activity, ability to communicate, and self-awareness. From these five credentials, Warren believes that a person needs to have at least some of them to be fully recognized. It is evident that the fetus has none of these credentials (besides ability to feel pain), therefore, for Warren, it is not a person and does not have any rights of an adult. There is one major question with her argument: when does a human gain enough of these rights to be considered a person? Warren admits that is impossible to draw the line between a fetus and an infant. Neither of these beings have the ability to communicate, be self-aware, self-motivated, or reason (they can feel pain). For Warren, someone needs to have several of the characteristics she lays down to be a person. Having one is not enough for consideration as this would include all animals as people. Therefore, if an infant is not a person, and a fetus is not a person, and it is morally acceptable to kill a fetus then it is morally acceptable to kill an infant. Warren accepts this conclusion, citing cases of infanticide in our history as justification as well as claiming infanticide is frowned upon due to its grotesque nature but is still morally permissible.

Relational Experience

Both of these defenses of abortion rest on the personhood of the fetus. Feminist concerns are largely ignored. Real life female experiences are ignored. To summarize the positions, anti-abortion proponents claim that the fetus has moral status or personhood and the mother is a passive agent whose responsibility revolves around protecting the fetus. Pregnancy is presented as a burden, but one that must be carried by women. Medicine has fostered this belief. As new technologies are developed the fetus viability occurs earlier and earlier. Doctors see the fetus as the patient and ignore the mother. This leads to the mother being portrayed as a potential antagonist against the fetus. This is by far the worse crime as it separates the bond which gives the fetus life and personhood.

This attack on women has pushed feminist thinkers to ignore the rights of the fetus to protect the rights of the mother. But pitting the mother and the fetus against each other is not the right way to analyze this issue. The fetus can have rights, but this does not negate the rights of the mother. The pairs' existence is relational in nature. In order for the fetus to survive it is dependent on another human. The same can be said for infants as well as mentally impaired individuals. The debate on abortion for the most part has rested on finding some trait that defines personhood for the fetus (including this paper). For Plato this would have been reason. For Bentham this would have been the ability to feel pain. For Warren this would be a combination of several traits. For Marquis this was the potential to have a future of value. These thinkers examined a distinguishable trait and try to identify or prove its absence in the fetus. This kind of thinking negates the female's role in abortion and claims that personhood is a function of the individual.

Persons are by nature members of a community. Rationality or the ability to feel pain is not enough to define a person. Persons grow in relationship with other persons. This is somewhat explained by a 'second person' theory given by Annette Baier. She believes that personhood is developed as one grows with other people. Collective history and interactions foster personhood development. This makes personhood a function of relations not simply whether an individual does not possess a particular property such as rationality.

Fetuses have a special relationship with the mother. It is hard for it to develop a direct relationship with other individuals. The fetus is also wholly dependent on the mother for survival. She is the party who makes the decisions regarding both of their future. This would seem to determine the fetus' worth only on the relational status according to the mother. This would mean if the mother does not believe that the fetus is relationally important enough for her then she could determine whether or not to have an abortion.

Examining this implication in terms of our other relationships has severe implications. This would mean that those we find do not have enough relational importance do not qualify for personhood according to us. This would allow us to treat them as something less than human and commit acts of atrocity towards them. Current society seems to function in this manner. We often view our moral actions as with an "us versus them" mindset. We alienate those less fortunate, different, and distant from us in order to treat them as less than human. Racist people determine that their relationship with people of other races is not important and that they are in fact more important than the other race. This allows them to treat people of this race differently than they would treat members of their own race. Certainly for adult humans ever relationship with another adult person is morally significant and important. We cannot just determine that our relationship is not meaningful. Does the same apply to the mother and the fetus?

The mother and fetal relationship is different than any other kind of relationship formed. In no other case are two bodies tied to each other so much for survival. This relationship is also one sided meaning that one party receives most of the benefits and the other takes on most of the costs. One party has their life, liberty, and happiness put on hold for the sake of the other. Does this burden allow the responsible part to determine the relational significance? In a perfect world women would not be in a position to make this decision of another human person. This is because in a perfect world there would be no unwanted pregnancies that would bind woman to the accepted relationship they fostered. Just as it is true that women cannot suddenly determine their relationship with their kids is not significant, they cannot determine that their relationship with their fetus is insignificant. This relationship would always be cherished for the strange and wonderful changes it has in both of the party's lives.

Impracticalities

Unfortunately we do not live in a perfect world. In a perfect world all women would enter pregnancy with open arms. This would negate the feminist concerns of women being coerced into pregnancy through society. Until society is structured so that women do not feel pressures to yield to sexual forces I am not sure we can say that women do not have the right to determine the moral significance of their relationship with the fetus. At a minimum further discussion would be needed to prove that despite the coercive nature of entering the relationship, women still do not get to decide the relational significance.

Main Argument

While I am not a pregnant woman nor do I have a significant other who has become pregnant, I can imagine the following situation: a woman is late for her period. She takes a pregnancy test and discovers she is pregnant. Later she goes to see a doctor to determine the health of the baby. She does not really accept that she is pregnant and does not really feel attached to the fetus. At a future appointment the doctor offers to show her the sonogram of the fetus. She searches the picture and finally the doctor points out the small dot which is her baby. The woman suddenly realizes that she is carrying a life inside her and immediately feels an infinite attachment to the small life in her. While this situation paints a happy picture, it describes the experience felt by at least some mothers. The mother does not forge the relationship with the

fetus until she sees the little spot. Modifying the situation slightly, let's take the same woman but say that the pregnancy was totally unwanted. She is dreading the doctor's visit for fear it will confirm her fears. She believes she would choose to terminate the pregnancy if she is in fact pregnant. When the doctor confirms her fears she has the abortion and never feels the same attachment she would have in the first case. In the first case it is clear that a strong relationship has formed between the mother and the fetus precluding any possibility of abortion. In the second case it is not clear if this relationship has formed. This may be the reason why pro-choice advocates react so strongly to pro-life advocates attempting to raise this relationship in mother's who wish to terminate the pregnancy by passing laws that force pregnant woman to view a sonogram, whether they want to or not, and regardless of the medical necessity for such a test. It is often the tactic of pro-life proposers to guilt mothers into realizing their relationship with the fetus. This raises all kinds of issues regarding these abortion cases.

Differences between Masculine and Feminine Thinking

Men and women think differently. This is derived from the differences in their upbringing. While girls are encouraged to identify and remain close to their mothers, boys are encouraged to separate and to not remain intimate with their mothers. This builds strength in relationship for girls that is not present in boys. Further in their development, boys begin to play competitive games with large groups of other boys. These individuals must set rules and guidelines to maintain order. Boys are taught to develop these rules based on the rights of everyone. However, girls play in smaller groups. They do not focus as much on rules as they do on relationships. They become more personally empathetic to their playmates, while boys remain distant. Girls develop more significant relationships while boys remain detached from their friends (of course all of these are generalities and are changing). Females place importance on

maintaining their relationships and taking care of each other. The detachment men use to explain justice is seen as the moral problem for girls.

Some feminist thinkers believe that abortion is a masculine way of thinking and justifying it in terms of universal principles is not feminist. It fails to realize the interconnectedness of life. Masculine personalities tend to seek control and dominate other things. Abortion is just another manifestation of our male controlled society. It does not respect the interconnectedness of the fetus and mother. Abortion uses violence to target and forcibly remove the fetus. The fetus who has no power is allowed to be oppressed by those with power. Furthermore, to believe that it is only the mother's responsibility and decision to abort the fetus is to sever the mother and fetus away from the rest of society. This is contrary to the female perspective which seeks to unify not divide people. Those who speak of the rights of the female or the fetus are focusing on the justice of the situation and not the empathetic response. Instead of an ethics of justice, perhaps an ethics of care should be more broadly examined. Feminist voices adopt a male voice in order to defend abortion and be heard in male oriented society.

Objections to this kind of thinking contrast the idea of care and relations with personal care. Perhaps women who want to have an abortion are caring for themselves. They are looking out for their well-being. However, this contrasts with the operation itself. Instead of being something that nurtures or makes one better, it is seen by women to be a violation. It is a perversion of nature and a violation on the woman's body. Further objections may include that the abortion in itself is harmful to the woman but it provides positive benefits. The image of a tumor being removed comes to mind. Removing a tumor would not be seen as a perversion of nature. This issue remains unclear.

Based on an ethics of care, we have a duty to care for others, but how far does this care extend and can caring for one person infringe on the care of another? Furthermore, the feminist perspective believes that relationships should be fostered. Yet we cannot have an infinite amount of relationships. Some relationships must be primed to make the others stronger. Perhaps an abortion is a priming to strengthen the bonds a woman has with other people. This leads to the problem of deciding which relationships are allowed to be severed. Criteria include those who possess reason, are related to us, or those who have not harmed us. Other ways to determine which relationships could be severed would be to examine the harm it would do to the other person or what relationship if severed would do the most harm (or least). Temperate separation versus total separation might also come into consideration. Looking for this criterion has masculine overtones. The search for when life begins or personhood is a masculine question.

Perhaps the only way to defend abortion from the feminist perspective (resting personhood in the hands of relationships) is to claim that there is no relationship between the fetus and the mother. It is necessary to determine when and how do morally significant relationships occur. This brings us back to the case of the woman who sees her fetus and the one who decides to have the abortion before becoming too attached. Some feminist define morally significant relationships as those with any other animal or species. These would include the Eco feminists or nonviolent feminists. Other thinkers want to limit morally significant relationships. Kant believes that morally significant relationships only include rational beings. Nel Noddings limits significant relationships to those who could possibly care for us in return for our care of the. To place significant relationships in the hands of when one feels inclined to care for the other being would be contrary to feminist thought. One other view is to claim that significant

relationships occur through the presence of or potential for a relation of reciprocity. More thought needs to be given to defining significant relationships and determining when they begin.

Considering the female voice still has the problem of the state of our current society. If we lived in a matriarchal or neutral society then the ethics of care could take a much more prominent role. In this society relationships would be stressed as equally as abstract concepts such as justice. Women are trapped into using masculine defined concepts to allow themselves to have an abortion because they do not have a full say in the use of their bodies. The real issue at hand in abortion is the imbalance of power between men and women. Personhood is put on the back burners to assist the arguments on both sides. Perhaps personhood is defined by one's relational being but this proves hard to justify in our male oriented society.

Objections

One of the most evident counter arguments against the claim that relationships determine personhood is to question what makes up these relationships or what makes them significant. Plato would claim that it is rationality that makes our relationships significant as it is when one has a thoughtful discussion with other people this is the pinnacle of a relationship. Thus it is the rational part of our soul that makes relationships important. But this does not agree with our current understanding of relationships. There are a lot of other factors which make us close with one another.

A second objection arises from the state of the world we live in. It is impossible for women to respond to adversity in the patriarchal society we live in a feminine way. This prompts people like Judith Thomson to develop masculine ways to answer moral issues. Women in general are forced to leave traditionally feminine roles in order to survive in the world. When so much emphasis is placed on male driven concerns such as justice, female thinkers need to adopt this male mindset to fight for their rights.