



Lesson 8: Abortion (Part 1)

Abortion: Your Choice or Murder?

For many women, the appearance of two parallel lines on a home pregnancy test results in the joyful anticipation of a new baby. For others, however, the news of a pregnancy may not be cause for celebration. The reasons for not wanting a pregnancy are varied and personal. A woman may not be in a position to support a child financially. She may be in an abusive relationship, or she may not be in a relationship at all. She may feel too young or not have enough support in place to undertake the responsibility of raising a baby. Perhaps, she wants to finish school and establish a career before starting a family. She may find herself pregnant as a result of sexual assault. A poor prenatal diagnosis indicating abnormalities or genetic defects in the baby may cause anxiety and stress in the mother. The mother's life may even be at risk. For these and many other reasons, a woman may decide to end her pregnancy in abortion.

What is abortion?

When an unborn fetus is removed or expelled from a uterus before the end of a pregnancy, and before the fetus would be able to survive on its own, it is referred to as an abortion. This can occur naturally, usually as a result of chromosomal abnormalities in the fetus. In this case, it is referred to as a spontaneous abortion or a miscarriage. When a fetus is intentionally removed from a uterus in order to terminate a pregnancy, it is called an induced abortion or simply an abortion. In most cases, medically induced abortions occur during the first trimester, which means before the twelfth week of pregnancy. Abortions that occur after the 21st week of pregnancy towards the end of the second trimester are commonly referred to as late term abortions. These carry an increased risk and are more controversial due to the fact that a fetus is generally considered viable and could exist outside the womb after 24 weeks of pregnancy.

The History of Abortion

Abortion is not a new phenomenon. Evidence suggests that the practice occurred in the Ancient Civilizations of China, Greece, Egypt, and the Roman Empire, among others. Then, the procedure was performed by providing women with a concoction of herbs to induce abortion, by using sharp tools to remove the fetus, applying forceful abdominal pressure, or other traditional techniques. In the Ancient world, abortion was a commonly accepted practice as most early philosophers believed that until the soul entered the fetus (which varied depending on interpretation, but generally believed to be around 40 days post-conception), the fetus was not considered human. Some believe that the writing of the Hippocratic Oath in the 5th century BCE, in which physicians pledged to "do no harm," was a way of forbidding the physicians of Ancient Greek from performing abortions. Others disagreed, arguing that the Hippocratic Oath did not forbid abortions, but rather simply discouraged dangerous methods of performing abortions to limit harm to the mother. In general, in the Ancient world, abortions were not controversial and procuring an abortion was not cause for guilt or shame. It was not until the spread of Christianity throughout the world that these attitudes began to shift.

What has the effect of religion been on attitudes towards abortion?

Christian ideology in the late 16th century declared abortion to be murder at any stage of pregnancy. The declaration, made by Pope Sixtus V, was not universally accepted and many Catholic scholars disagreed, arguing that until the mother experienced quickening (the flutters that an expectant mother feels when the fetus begins to move), an abortion was acceptable. The scholars debated until well into the 19th century when the Catholic Church emphatically denounced abortion. Today, all major world religions continue to engage in the debate about the morality of abortion and the questions about when life truly begins. Most Christian denominations oppose abortion at any stage of pregnancy, believing that life begins at conception. Islamic

traditions typically believe that the fetus gains a soul 120 days after conception, although the exact stage of fetal development where an abortion is permitted differs among Islamic scholars. Judaism states that a fetus is not deserving of the rights of a human being until birth. However, a fetus does deserve protection and Jewish scholars differ on the circumstances in which abortion is permissible. Despite disagreements about when life begins, most religious traditions will allow abortions to occur under certain circumstances, such as when the mother's life is in peril. The morality of abortion is often discussed on a case-by-case basis and is often influenced by the laws and ideals of the country in which a woman resides.

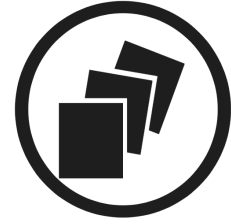
Where is abortion legal?

The legality of abortion throughout the world is not a clear-cut issue. Religious beliefs, societal moral codes, and cultural practices all influence abortion laws. In some countries, such as Canada, the United States, Russia, China, and Australia, abortions are legal on request. The gestational limits at which an abortion can occur in these countries vary, the most common limit being 12 weeks gestational age. Recently, Iceland introduced one of the most liberal abortion laws in the world, allowing abortions to occur up to 22 weeks gestational age. In countries like China, abortions can actually be mandatory in order to enforce laws dictating the number of children in a household. Other countries (ex. India, Finland) allow abortions under broad socio-economic conditions, where continuation of a pregnancy might negatively impact a woman's quality of life. Still other countries allow abortions for reasons of maternal or fetal health (ex. Argentina, Poland) or if the mother's life is at risk (ex. Brazil, Mexico, and Iran). A few countries in the world prohibit abortions under all circumstances. This includes countries such as Egypt, Iraq, and Angola. Abortion laws throughout the world are continually evolving, reflecting the changing attitudes and moral issues associated with the practice of abortion.

What are the moral issues?

Since ancient civilizations, the abortion debate has not seen consensus. In our modern world, it continues to be a contentious issue that evokes strong emotional reactions on both sides of the debate. Not only does the fundamental question of when life begins remain disputed, but other moral and ethical questions pervade the debate. On the pro-life side, which tends to be supported by conservative religious groups, life at all stages is sacred, and abortion is murder. Easy access to legal abortions means that people can be irresponsible in their sexual behaviour, safe in the knowledge that an accidental pregnancy is easily terminated. On the other side of the debate, the pro-choice supporters strongly emphasize that a woman has the right to decide what happens with her own body. A woman who becomes pregnant as a result of sexual assault or who learns that the fetus she is carrying is compromised should be allowed the option of abortion.

It is unlikely that consensus will ever be reached among individuals on this highly charged issue. When members of a society hold such vastly opposing views, one can expect disagreement and debate. Therefore, the responsibilities of regulators become extremely important. Perhaps it is a question of whether a service like abortion needs to take into account moral, religious, and philosophical viewpoints in order to guide lawmakers in developing a societal consensus. Since abortion is a medical issue, perhaps regulations should be generated based on health outcomes instead of personal ethics. However the issue is tackled, it is certain that this is not the end of the debate.



Abortion Vocabulary

Play this card game in groups of three or four. Shuffle the cards and place the deck in the middle. Player 1 takes a card and reads the definition aloud. Players 2 and 3 try to guess the vocabulary word or phrase. Player 1 gives the card to the player who correctly guesses the word or phrase first.

If both players answer correctly, Player 1 returns the card to the bottom of the deck. If neither player answers correctly, Player 1 reads the answer and returns the card to the bottom of the deck. The player to the left takes the next turn. The player with the most cards at the end is the winner.

This serious game provides useful practice learning the precise definitions and vocabulary for this chapter. Since only correct answers can win the card, this game provides opportunities for implicit peer-feedback in a safe and structured way. This game also provides opportunities for careful listening, friendly competition, and reciprocal teaching.



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Animal Rights Vocabulary

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Abortion Vocabulary

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<p>A flaw or deformity, typically in a medical context.</p> <p>abnormality</p>	<p>The deliberate termination of a human pregnancy, most often performed during the first 28 weeks of pregnancy.</p> <p>abortion</p>
<p>Engaging in or characterized by habitual violence and cruelty.</p> <p>abusive</p>	<p>The start of life as a physically separate being upon emerging from the body of its mother.</p> <p>birth</p>
<p>Covering a large number and wide scope of subjects.</p> <p>broad</p>	<p>Made vulnerable.</p> <p>compromised</p>
<p>The process of becoming pregnant involving fertilization of an egg.</p> <p>conception</p>	<p>A mixture of various ingredients or elements.</p> <p>concoction</p>
<p>A general agreement.</p> <p>consensus</p>	<p>Averse to change or innovation and holding traditional values.</p> <p>conservative</p>
<p>Causing or likely to cause an argument; controversial.</p> <p>contentious</p>	<p>An imperfection.</p> <p>defect</p>

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<p>Publicly declare to be wrong or evil.</p> <p>denounced</p>	<p>The identification of the nature of an illness by examination of the symptoms.</p> <p>diagnosis</p>
<p>An unborn offspring of a mammal, in particular an unborn human baby more than eight weeks after conception.</p> <p>fetus</p>	<p>The first three months of a pregnancy.</p> <p>first trimester</p>
<p>Relating to pregnancy.</p> <p>gestational</p>	<p>Physical injury.</p> <p>harm</p>
<p>Feeling great pleasure and happiness.</p> <p>joyful</p>	<p>Legislators.</p> <p>lawmakers</p>
<p>Required by law or rules; compulsory.</p> <p>mandatory</p>	<p>The expulsion of a fetus from the womb before it is able to survive independently, especially spontaneously or as the result of accident.</p> <p>miscarriage</p>
<p>The unlawful premeditated killing of one human being by another.</p> <p>murder</p>	<p>A result or a consequence.</p> <p>outcome</p>

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<p>Be present and apparent throughout.</p> <p>pervade</p>	<p>Make a solemn promise.</p> <p>pledge</p>
<p>During pregnancy but before birth.</p> <p>prenatal</p>	<p>Obtain something with care or effort.</p> <p>procure</p>
<p>Have one's permanent home in a particular place.</p> <p>reside</p>	<p>An academic specialist in a particular branch of study.</p> <p>scholar</p>
<p>An assault of a sexual nature that violates the sexual integrity of the victim.</p> <p>sexual assault</p>	<p>Change direction or tendency.</p> <p>shift</p>
<p>Extend over a large or increasing area.</p> <p>spread</p>	<p>Make determined efforts to deal with a problem or difficult task.</p> <p>tackle</p>
<p>In every part of a place or object.</p> <p>throughout</p>	<p>Commit oneself to a responsibility.</p> <p>undertake</p>