The Morality Of Having Children

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Summary

The article “Genetics and Reproductive Risk: Can Having Children Be Immoral?” was written by Laura M. Purdy in 1994 and was published by the Cornwell University Press. The article explores the morality issues related to the conception of offspring while realizing the genetic risks associated with the birth of such a child. The author further explores the ethical implications and legitimacy of abortion associated with terminating a fetus with foreseeable genetic complications. Practising prenatal screening to make an informed decision is important as it can prevent the birth of children who are genetically compromised. However, the views that consider abortion a wrongful killing are much more prevalent. The common argument for terminating a pregnancy at the fetal stage is that of equity of individuals, which presumes that a right to life begins at the time of conception. Therefore, murdering a fetus just because of its imperfection is wrong. The contrasting argument in this regard posits that an early termination can save a person from a lifetime of misery. There is considerable evidence that proves the transmission of lethal diseases such as the Tay-Sachs, which should be prevented no matter the cost. The primary concern presented by the author postulates that conception can be considered morally wrong due to genetic risks; however, this is not true in the case of people who are partial to prenatal screening and selective abortion. The author furthers her stance and argues that it is ethically wrong to reproduce, knowing that the risk of transmitting a defect or a disease is high; therefore, those who oppose abortion must consciously refrain from conception in cases where there is a chance of a genetic irregularity. The author supports her claims by arguing that we must ensure the provision of a good life for the child. Secondly, the actual harm is not in preventing the birth of a diseased child; it’s rather the opposite. Moreover, our obligation to provide opportunities for a good life to our children is far greater than the parent’s right to procreate. With the advancements in the field of genetics, such as the discovery of the gene that causes Huntington’s disease and prenatal screening, as well as the availability of other options for satisfying the desire to be a parent, such as adoption, sperm replacement, and egg donation, can help avoid this controversial issue altogether. Genetic testing has offered numerous opportunities to individuals, and they can know the risks if they test positive, opting for suitable measures later on. While some people believe that ignorance is bliss, the author argues the detriments of being oblivious at the cost of causing harm to others. She concludes her argument that until established otherwise, people at risk of transmitting Huntington’s disease are morally obligated to prevent the suffering of their child, thereby seeking available support to make an informed choice (Purdy, 1994).

Counterargument

The counterarguments of this thesis range from each individual being equally important to consider the fetus as a life form with designated rights, therefore attributing its abortion as murder or wrongful killing. Another contrasting view is presented by Jeremy Williams, who argues that committing to such a liberal view about selective abortion will open up a realm of never-ending concerns. Once a pro-choice stance is adopted towards selective abortion, it would ultimately weaken the stance against prohibiting “sex-selective abortion”. There will be no limit to the undesirable traits, and these may range from disease susceptibility to the desired intelligence and from physical appearance to criminality (2012). Jeff McMahan furthers this argument by positing that the solution lies in changing the mindsets and eliminating the societal discrimination against people who are different, and not in eliminating the victims of such discriminatory views (2005).

Personal Perspective

Although both sides present a reasonable argument, I believe that although there are certain moral implications associated with terminating a fetal-stage pregnancy, given the established genetic risks and lifelong suffering, the right thing to do is to opt for selective abortion. I support the view that each individual is equally important. However, it is the responsibility of the potential parents to ensure that the child being born is provided with an opportunity for a healthy life. Although it cannot be guaranteed even in a normal case scenario, once prenatal testing proves a genetic irregularity, opting to give birth to a child is a cruel act as the parents are consciously sentencing the child to a life of misery. I believe that the parents and the medical professionals should take into account all the possible outcomes after prenatal testing, and the decision should reflect the benefit of the child being born rather than attributing it to murder. Since there are many other ways to become a parent, people must educate themselves about these and adopt a method that ensures the safety of the child. Attributing the fetus to be a life form when it cannot even make a rational choice about its existence is concerning, and in such a scenario, the responsibility falls upon the parents. I believe that certain steps become necessary to avoid long-term agony, and laws should be enforced to limit selective abortion to a genetic disorder of a fatal nature. Only by promoting a discussion on such taboo topics and educating the masses can we change the perceptions of people and establish societal practices that are for the greater good.

References

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