

**THE IMPERMISSIBILITY OF ABORTION VS WOMEN'S RIGHT: A KANTIAN
APPROACH**

BY

IGEH ELOOGHENE FEGO

ART2201413

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN
BENIN CITY**

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work titled; **THE IMPERMISSIBILITY OF ABORTION VS WOMEN'S RIGHT: A KANTIAN APPROACH** was carried out by **IGEHE ELOOGHENE FEGO** with matriculation number **ART2201413** of the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin- City.

REV. (FR.) DR. A. O. OBAZEE
(Project Supervisor)

DATE

DR. W. T. OSEMWEGIE
(Acting Head of Department)

DATE

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty, the gracious and kind Father, whose love, guidance, and protection have sustained me throughout my academic journey. Truly, without Him, none of this would have been possible.

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First and foremost, my deepest gratitude goes to God Almighty, whose grace, wisdom, and unfailing love have been my anchor throughout this journey. His presence has strengthened me in moments of weakness, guided me in times of uncertainty, and filled my heart with hope and perseverance. Truly, without Him, this achievement would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the debate between the idea that abortion is morally wrong (impermissible) and the belief that women have the right to make decisions about their own bodies. It focuses on feminist arguments that support women's freedom and equality, showing how access to abortion can be essential for these rights. The project also includes the views of philosopher Immanuel Kant, who believed that human life has special value because of our ability to reason. From Kant's perspective, abortion might be seen as wrong because it ends a potential rational life. However, the feminist view argues that a woman's right to control her body should be respected, especially when her health, freedom, or future is at stake. The project compares these views to help understand both sides of the issue.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The debate surrounding abortion and women's rights is one that has provoked significant ethical, legal, and philosophical controversies over the past several decades. At its core lies a tension between the belief in the inviolability of potential human life and the imperative to respect and uphold a woman's autonomy over her own body. These conflicting moral claims have inspired extensive scholarly inquiry, particularly within the realm of deontological ethics. A Kantian approach to this debate is especially compelling because it draws on the foundational principles of moral duty, universality, and the inherent dignity of rational beings¹. This background study seeks to lay the philosophical groundwork necessary to examine these competing claims, considering how Kant's categorical imperative and theories of autonomy intersect with the modern discourse on abortion.

Kant's ethical framework rests on the categorical imperative, a principle asserting that one should act only according to maxims that one would will to become universal law. Central to this is the duty to treat every rational being as an end in itself and never solely as a means to an end². Proponents of the view that abortion is impermissible often invoke this principle by arguing that a fetus, regarded as a potential rational being, possesses an inviolable dignity that must be safeguarded. Accordingly, any deliberate termination of that potential life is seen as a failure to

¹ Kant, I. (1785), *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (A. Wood, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

respect the inherent moral value of the individual³. This interpretation draws on the idea that if a maxim permitting abortion were universalized, it would undermine the fundamental respect due to human life, thereby eroding the ethical standards essential to a moral society.

Applying Kantian principles to the abortion debate introduces significant complexities. One of the most challenging aspects lies in determining when moral personhood and rational agency begin. Critics of the rigid Kantian stance contend that a foetus may not yet have developed the capacities required for full moral agency, a status that, according to Kant, is the bedrock of possessing rights.⁴ In contrast, women's rights advocates argue that even if the fetus holds some form of potential moral value, this does not supersede the rights of the pregnant woman. They emphasize that the woman, as a fully autonomous rational agent, must be granted the right to exercise self-determination, particularly when the implications of pregnancy extend to her health, social status, and future life prospects⁵. This position posits that any ethical framework, including Kantian ethics, must reconcile the respect for potential life with the immediate and concrete rights of the individual exercising her autonomy.

The issue of autonomy occupies a central role in modern ethical discourse and is pivotal in feminist critiques of abortion laws. Within Kantian thought, autonomy is not merely the capacity

³ Wood, A. (1999), *Kantian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 101.

⁴ Johnson, R. (2007), "Kantian Ethics and the Moral Status of the Fetus". *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 4(2), 153-172.

⁵ Noddings, N. (2013), *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*. (California: University of California Press), p. 50.

for self-determination; it is an expression of rational agency that confers intrinsic moral worth⁶. Thus, forcing a woman to continue a pregnancy against her will could be interpreted as a profound violation of her autonomy and moral dignity. By insisting that every person must be treated as an end in themselves, Kant's philosophy provides a dual-edged challenge: while it demands respect for potential human life, it simultaneously enforces a rigorous standard that upholds the individual's right to self-governance. This dialectic underscores the inherent tension in applying Kantian principles to abortion, as it requires a balance between the abstract moral duty to potential life and the lived realities of women who must make complex decisions about their bodily integrity.

In reviewing the historical evolution of Kantian ethics and its implications for contemporary issues such as abortion, it becomes clear that the discourse is far from settled. Kant's theoretical constructs, formulated within the context of Enlightenment rationality, have both illuminated and complicated modern debates by providing a normative framework that is at once universal yet demanding of contextual sensitivity.⁷ Modern interpretations often challenge the traditional Kantian view by asserting that the context-specific experiences and lived realities of women should command equal moral consideration. Consequently, scholars continue to debate whether Kantian ethics necessarily mandates the impermissibility of abortion or if a more nuanced application can accommodate a defense of women's rights without compromising the ethical commitment to potential human life.

⁶ Hill, T. E. (2006), *Respect, Plurality, and Justice: Kantian Perspectives*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 92.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The issue of abortion remains one of the most contentious debates in contemporary moral, legal, and political discourse. Central to this debate is the apparent conflict between the impermissibility of abortion often framed from moral, religious, or philosophical grounds and the assertion of women's rights, particularly the right to bodily autonomy and reproductive choice. This debate becomes especially significant when examined through a feminist lens, which seeks to dismantle the social structures and ideologies that have historically oppressed women.

The central problem arises from the moral argument that abortion constitutes the unjust taking of innocent life. From this standpoint, abortion is seen as ethically impermissible regardless of the circumstances, as it involves terminating a foetus that is considered morally significant. This view is often backed up by deontological ethics, notably the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who emphasized the intrinsic worth of all rational beings and the moral duty to treat humanity, whether in oneself or another, always as an end and never as a means only. Kant's theory, rooted in the concept of moral law and categorical imperatives, may be interpreted to suggest that deliberately ending a potential rational life such as that of a foetus violates the universal moral duty to preserve life. However, Kant's framework also insists on the autonomy and rationality of moral agents. Feminist scholars have argued that the application of Kantian ethics must also account for the moral agency of women. If women are autonomous rational being, then denying them the capacity to make decisions about their own bodies, including whether or not to carry a pregnancy to term constitutes a failure to treat them as ends in themselves. This creates a philosophical dilemma: can Kantian ethics simultaneously prohibit abortion and yet defend a woman's moral agency?

The debate around abortion often oscillates between extremes pro-life and pro-choice without adequately exploring the nuanced ethical dimensions that lie between. For instance, while some philosophers and religious ethicists view abortion as morally impermissible due to the intrinsic value of fetal life, others see it as morally justified based on principles of autonomy, personhood, and justice. However, these perspectives are frequently discussed in isolation, rather than being placed in critical dialogue with one another. There is a conspicuous lack of integrative moral analysis that can synthesize competing values such as life, choice, responsibility, and justice into a coherent evaluative framework.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research work includes:

1. To examine the moral arguments against abortion.
2. To explore Kant's ethical view on human right and duty.
3. To analyze the conflict between conflict and freedom.
4. To seek a balanced ethical framework on the issue of abortion.
5. To contribute to the ongoing debate about abortion in a fair, respectful, and informed way.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the conflict between moral duty and personal autonomy.
2. To bring attention to how legal and moral restrictions on abortion can undermine women's freedom, equality, and autonomy.

3. To analyze whether denying a woman the right to choose violates her dignity as a moral agent.
4. To encourages thoughtful, balanced, and respectful engagement with the issue abortion.
5. By using Kant's philosophy and feminist ethics, it encourages us to think deeply about both the value of life and the dignity of women.

1.5 SCOPE OF STUDY

The scope of this study encompasses a thorough exploration of the contrasting ethical frameworks embodied in Kantian deontological thought and contemporary perspectives on women's rights. Primarily, the study critically evaluates the intricate details of Kant's categorical imperative, focusing on its insistence on duty, universal moral laws, and the inherent dignity of rational beings. By examining these core principles, the research delineates the boundaries of Kantian ethics, specifically scrutinizing the debate over whether the fetus qualifies as a rational being with intrinsic moral worth under such a framework. The study thus limits itself to analyzing the theoretical underpinnings and historical evolution of Kantian thought as it relates to the issue of abortion, without extending into other normative ethical theories except as necessary for comparative purposes.

In essence, the research investigates the legal and ethical dimensions of women's rights in relation to bodily autonomy and self-determination. The scope here is twofold: first, it reviews current legal frameworks and feminist ethical critiques that champion the right to choose, and second, it assesses how these modern imperatives intersect with and sometimes conflict with Kantian deontological positions. The inquiry is designed to critically compare these paradigms by

mapping out points of convergence and divergence, particularly regarding the concepts of personhood and moral agency. This approach ensures that the study remains focused on the central tension between the impermissibility of abortion, as argued from a Kantian perspective, and the emphasis on protecting a woman's bodily rights and autonomy in contemporary discourse. The study confines its examination to the philosophical, legal, and ethical implications arising from this tension, deliberately excluding broader socio-economic factors or medical considerations unless they directly illuminate the ethical debate. Although acknowledging that issues of abortion are multifaceted, the focus remains steadfast on the conceptual and ethical clash between deontological imperatives and rights-based approaches. This includes a systematic review of both primary texts in Kant's philosophy and contemporary feminist literature, ensuring that the debate is both historically grounded and relevant to contemporary legal and ethical challenges.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the study shall be analytic cum critical in nature. Analytic in the sense that the issue at stake shall be examined in detail. It has to do with a thorough breakdown; a conceptual clarification, a detailed explanation of the issue at stake. And critical in that, it is not a negative appraisal, but rational, impartial, articulate and fair appraisal whether positive or negative. It should be noted that to be "critical" of received ideas is accordingly not the same as rejecting them: It consists rather in seriously asking oneself whether the ideas in question should be reformed, modified or conserved, and in applying one's entire intellectual and imaginative intelligence to the search for an answer.

As a result of the above, materials to prosecute this research work will be gotten from the library as well as other relevant sources.

1.7 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

Autonomy: In Kantian moral philosophy, it is the capacity of an agent to act in accordance with objective morality rather than under the influence of desires.⁸

Abortion: This is the deliberate termination of a human pregnancy, most often performed during the first twenty-eight weeks of pregnancy. It is also seen as the early unintentional ending of a pregnancy when a baby is too early and dies before it is fully developed.⁹

Impermissibility: The term "impermissibility" refers to the quality or state of not being permitted or allowable. It denotes whether an action, behavior, or decision is acceptable according to a particular set of rules, principles, or standards. In various contexts, impermissibility can be assessed based on legal, ethical, religious, or social criteria.¹⁰

Women's Right: This refers to the rights, claimed by and for women, of equal privileges and opportunities with men.¹¹

⁸ Wood, A. (1999), *Kantian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 112.

⁹ Hornby, A. S. (2005), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 77.

¹⁰ Peters, P. (2013), *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Grammar*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 111.

¹¹ Hornby, A. S. (2005), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 423.

Personhood: Personhood refers to the state or condition of being a person, encompassing the qualities that distinguish individuals as unique and deserving of rights and responsibilities.¹²

Fetus: According to the Cambridge dictionary, the term fetus is a young human or animal that is developing inside its mother, especially after the organs have started to form.¹³

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

I. Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*¹⁴ serves as the cornerstone of deontological ethics and provides the theoretical basis for later debates on moral duties and universal law. In this text, Kant introduces the categorical imperative, a principle requiring that one act only according to maxims which can be universally adopted. For scholars debating the permissibility of abortion, this work is indispensable because it provides the framework by which moral agency and the inherent dignity of rational beings are judged. While the text does not explicitly address abortion, its rigorous exploration of duty, autonomy, and respect forms a backdrop against which any discussion about the moral status of potential life versus bodily autonomy can be critically examined. The work is foundational in understanding how absolute moral imperatives may conflict with contemporary values that prize individual rights.

¹² Hornby, A. S. (2005), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 8th Edition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 319.

¹³ Peters, P. (2013), *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Grammar*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 98.

¹⁴ Kant, I. (1785), *Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals*, (A. Wood, Trans.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 92.

*The Metaphysics of Morals*¹⁵ extends Kant's exploration of duty into the realm of practical ethics and legal philosophy. This work is divided into a theory of right and a theory of virtue, providing a more nuanced understanding of the obligations imposed on individuals within a society. For the abortion debate, the text is particularly valuable because it discusses the complex interplay between legal rights and moral duties. Kant's insistence on the inviolability of rational beings is critical when interpreting the moral standing of the fetus and, by extension, evaluating abortion from a duty-based perspective. The discussion on the foundations of legal rights helps frame how societies might interpret laws related to abortion and women's bodily autonomy under a strict moral regime.

A. W. Wood's *Kantian Ethics*¹⁶ offers a contemporary interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy, making the dense and historical text accessible to modern audiences. Wood critically examines the categorical imperative and other central ideas of Kantian ethics, focusing on themes such as autonomy, dignity, and the moral law. This volume is particularly helpful for a study on abortion because it highlights the strengths and limitations of applying Kant's rigid moral framework to complex ethical issues like abortion. Wood's analysis helps readers navigate the tension between a deontological commitment to preserving potential human life and the imperative to respect individual autonomy, thereby setting up a dialogue between historical theories and current ethical debates.

¹⁵ Kant, I. (1998), *The Metaphysics of Morals*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 156.

¹⁶ Wood, A. W. (2007), *Kantian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 32.

In *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*¹⁷, C. M. Korsgaard revisits Kant's vision of a society governed by universal moral laws and examines how modern interpretations of autonomy and rationality fit within that framework. Korsgaard argues for the relevance of Kantian ethics in contemporary moral dilemmas, proposing that a reinterpretation of the categorical imperative can reconcile the tension between moral duty and individual freedom. Her approach is directly relevant to the abortion debate, as it offers a pathway to integrate respect for the potential moral status of the fetus with an acknowledgment of a woman's right to control her own body. Korsgaard's work serves as a bridge between strict deontological ethics and rights-based perspectives, providing critical insights into how Kantian thought might be adapted to modern social issues.

J. J. Thomson's seminal essay *A Defense of Abortion*¹⁸, often cited as a pioneering work in the abortion debate, presents thought experiments that challenge the absolutism of anti-abortion arguments. Thomson does not settle the debate on the moral status of the fetus but rather shifts the focus to the rights and bodily autonomy of the woman. Her analysis is instrumental in highlighting the limitations of applying a one-size-fits-all moral imperative to complex cases, thereby offering a counter-narrative to Kantian or deontological positions that might oppose abortion on principle. In the context of a Kantian approach, Thomson's defense forces a critical reconsideration of how rigid moral duties might conflict with the practical demands of individual autonomy and self-determination.

¹⁷ Korsgaard, C. M. (1996), *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 33.

¹⁸ Thomson, J. J. (1971), *A Defense of Abortion*, (New York: Association for the Study of Abortion), p. 22.

M. Tooley's work *Abortion and Infanticide: A Defense of the Moral Permissibility of Abortion*¹⁹ rigorously defends the moral permissibility of abortion and, controversially, even infanticide, by dissecting the concept of personhood and the emergence of moral status. Through logical argumentation, Tooley challenges traditional views on the intrinsic value of potential life, questioning whether the fetus ever attains a status that warrants absolute protection under moral law. This book serves as an essential counterpoint as it juxtaposes the deontological imperatives found in Kant's writings with arguments that emphasize the conditional nature of moral rights. In doing so, Tooley compels readers to critically assess the thresholds of moral agency and personhood, which are central to debates about abortion and the rights of women.

C. Kaczor's *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life, and the Limits of Freedom*²⁰ engages directly with the ethical conflicts in the abortion debate by weighing the value of human life against the protection of women's rights. Kaczor provides a detailed analysis of both sides of the argument, delineating the moral and logical foundations of anti-abortion stances while carefully considering the implications for women's bodily autonomy. By exploring various moral frameworks including deontological and rights-based approaches this work enriches the discussion on whether strict moral duties, as espoused by Kant, can be reconciled with modern conceptions of freedom. Kaczor's critique is invaluable for understanding how abstract moral principles translate into concrete legal and social outcomes, and it challenges theorists to reconsider the applicability of Kantian ethics to contemporary issues.

¹⁹ Tooley, M. (1983), *Abortion and Infanticide: A Defense of the Moral Permissibility of Abortion*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 77.

²⁰ Kaczor, C. (2014), *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life, and the Limits of Freedom*, (London: Taylor & Francis), p. 29.

R. M. Schott, *Feminist Interpretations of Kant*²¹ brings together a range of feminist perspectives on Kantian ethics, offering critical examinations of how Kant's theories have been interpreted and often contested by feminist scholars. The contributions typically explore the tension between Kant's emphasis on rationality and autonomy and the lived experiences of women, particularly regarding issues like reproductive rights. By aggregating diverse viewpoints, the volume provides a comprehensive overview of the ways in which feminist scholars both critique and repurpose Kantian ethics to better address contemporary ethical dilemmas, including abortion. Such reinterpretations are pivotal for understanding the limitations and potential adaptations of Kant's moral philosophy in a modern context where women's rights are increasingly central to ethical debates.

In the book titled, *Abortion and Feminist Ethics*²² by C. M. Korsgaard offers a collection of essays that examine the abortion debate through the lens of feminist ethical theory. The contributors critically analyze traditional moral arguments including those derived from Kantian thought and juxtapose them with feminist approaches that foreground lived experience, social justice, and bodily autonomy. This collection underscores the multiplicity of viewpoints in the abortion debate and enriches the scholarly dialogue by highlighting how established ethical doctrines can be both challenged and reinterpreted in light of feminist insights. The volume is essential for contextualizing the debate within broader societal and ethical shifts, serving as a platform for reconciling conflicting moral paradigms.

²¹ Schott, R. M. (eds), (1997), *Feminist Interpretations of Kant*, (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press), p. 39.

²² Korsgaard, C. M. (2003), *Abortion and Feminist Ethics*, (New York: Routledge), p. 67.

In the book, *Ethics, Rights, and Public Policy: Kantian Perspectives on Contemporary Social Issues*²³, J. F. Mooley, broadens the discussion by situating Kantian ethics within the framework of modern public policy debates. It addresses how Kant's moral principles especially his emphasis on duty and universality can influence and shape contemporary legal and ethical decisions on issues such as abortion. Chapters dedicated to reproductive rights illustrate the challenges of enforcing rigid moral laws in a pluralistic society and examine the potential conflicts between absolute ethical imperatives and the rights-based claims of individuals. By providing case studies and policy analysis, the book offers practical insights into how Kantian thought is interpreted in modern legal and political arenas.

Christopher Kaczor in his book *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life, and the Question of Justice*²⁴ defended the impermissibility of abortion from a philosophical and natural law perspective while engaging seriously with feminist concerns. Kaczor argues that the fetus has inherent moral worth from conception and that abortion constitutes a violation of basic human rights. He criticized several feminist defenses of abortion, particularly those who argued that women have the right to their body and should be allowed to do what they like with their body without interference. Kaczor takes issue with Judith Jarvis Thomson's "violinist" analogy, claiming it oversimplifies the moral obligations parents have toward their offspring. Importantly, he does not dismiss feminist concerns about systemic oppression but attempts to reconcile them with a pro-life ethic that values both women and the unborn. Hence, Kaczor calls for a societal

²³ Mooley, J. F. (2009), *Ethics, Rights, and Public Policy: Kantian Perspectives on Contemporary Social Issues*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 88.

²⁴ Kaczor, C. (2011), *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life, and the Question of Justice* (New York, NY), p. 12

transformation that supports women so they are not forced to choose between motherhood and self-determination. According to Kaczor, justice requires protecting the most vulnerable.

*The Sexual Politics of Reproduction*²⁵ by Gena Corea provides a radical feminist critique of reproductive technologies and abortion within a patriarchal framework. Corea argues that even the pro-choice movement can fall into traps set by male-dominated medical and political institutions, which commodify women's bodies and reduce reproductive freedom to a narrow right to terminate pregnancy. She advocates for a broader, more holistic feminist vision that emphasizes reproductive justice the right to have children, not have children, and parent in safe environments. Corea critiques both pro-life and pro-choice extremes for sidelining the systemic issues that limit women's real choices. She delves into how poor women and women of colour are disproportionately affected by abortion politics, often coerced into sterilization or denied access to healthcare. While she supports the legality of abortion, she remains skeptical of how capitalist and patriarchal forces shape women's reproductive decisions. Corea's intersectional feminist lens exposes how both the impermissibility of abortion and the overemphasis on choice can obscure the material conditions that limit autonomy.

In *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice*²⁶ by F. J. Beckwith, the book offers a robust philosophical and legal critique of abortion, rooted in natural law theory, while attempting to answer feminist arguments in favour of reproductive autonomy. Beckwith argues that human life begins at conception and that all humans, regardless of development stage,

²⁵ Corea, G. (1985), *The Sexual Politics of Reproduction*, (New York: Harper & Row), p. 23.

²⁶ Beckwith, F. J. (2007), *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 19.

deserve moral consideration and legal protection. He engages directly with feminist philosophers such as Judith Jarvis Thomson, Mary Anne Warren, and Susan Sherwin, arguing that their theories overemphasize bodily rights at the expense of the foetus's inherent dignity. Beckwith argued against the idea that pregnancy is a form of involuntary servitude, asserting that pregnancy, while burdensome, is a natural consequence of human reproduction and not inherently oppressive. He emphasizes that legalizing abortion reinforces a culture of disposability rather than one of care.

In *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behaviour*²⁷ by R. Weitz, the book presented abortion as a crucial issue of bodily autonomy, self-determination, and gender equality. The author maintained that religious and conservative ideologies use moral arguments to police reproductive rights and frame women as passive vessels rather than autonomous agents. She went further to state that race, class, and socioeconomic status intersect with abortion access, making the issue not just about individual rights but social justice. The book does not treat abortion as a moral absolute but instead emphasizes context, lived experiences, and power dynamics. It should be noted that while the book clearly took sides with a pro-choice feminist stance, it calls for a more nuanced understanding of reproductive freedom.

*Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*²⁸ by K. Pollitt is another book reviewed in the course of this project work. Here, Pollitt rejects the framing of abortion as a tragic necessity and instead argues that it should be seen as a moral good that allows women to live full, self-determined lives. She critiques the stigmatization of abortion and the political rhetoric that depicts women as careless or

²⁷ Weitz, R. (1998), *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behaviour* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 6.

²⁸ Pollitt, K. (2014), *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*, (New York, Oxford University Press), p. 43.

immoral for terminating pregnancies. Pollitt skillfully dismantles pro-life arguments by demonstrating how they are often rooted in religious fundamentalism and misogyny rather than genuine concern for life. She pointed out the inconsistency of pro-life movements that oppose abortion but fail to support maternal healthcare, childcare, and welfare programs.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEBATE ON THE IMPERMISSIBILITY OF ABORTION

2.1 ETHICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE ANTI-ABORTION ARGUMENT

The ethical and philosophical foundations of the anti-abortion argument are deeply rooted in a variety of moral, metaphysical, and religious traditions that assert the sanctity and inherent value of human life. Central to the anti-abortion stance is the belief that human life begins at conception, and therefore, the fetus possesses moral status and a right to life from its earliest stage of development. This position is often grounded in natural law theory, which posits that moral principles are embedded in human nature and discoverable through reason. According to natural

law theorists like Thomas Aquinas, actions that go against the natural order such as abortion are intrinsically immoral because they violate the basic good of life.²⁹

Philosophically, the anti-abortion argument is supported by the deontological ethics of Immanuel Kant, which emphasize duty and the intrinsic worth of individuals. From a Kantian perspective, human beings must always be treated as ends in themselves and never merely as means to an end. Applied to the abortion debate, this implies that the fetus, as a potential rational being, should not be treated as a means to an end—whether that be convenience, economic stability, or bodily autonomy³⁰. Thus, aborting a fetus is considered a moral violation of its inherent dignity.

Another influential philosophical position in the anti-abortion discourse is the "potentiality argument", which holds that because a fetus has the potential to develop into a full human person, it should be accorded moral consideration from conception. Robert George and Christopher Tollefsen argue that there is no morally relevant break in the development of the human being from conception to adulthood; therefore, drawing the line at any other stage is arbitrary³¹. They maintain that human embryos and fetuses are not potential human beings but actual human beings with potential making abortion a direct killing of a human subject.

Ethically, the principle of the sanctity of life undergirds most religiously-influenced anti-abortion arguments. From a Judeo-Christian standpoint, life is considered a gift from God and thus not

²⁹ Aquinas, T. (1947), *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. (Italy: Benziger Bros), p. 11.

³⁰ Kant, I. (1785), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by H. J. Paton. (New York: Harper & Row), p. 22.

³¹ George, R. P. & Tollefsen, C. (2008), *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life*. (London: Doubleday Publishers), p. 34.

subject to human termination. Biblical texts such as Psalm 139:13–16 emphasize God’s role in the formation of life within the womb, reinforcing the view that life begins at conception and must be protected³². Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church categorically opposes abortion, considering it a grave moral disorder. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, declared that abortion is a “murderous act” because it unjustly takes the life of an innocent human being.³³

Many anti-abortion advocates draw on virtue ethics, particularly the idea that moral agents should cultivate virtues such as compassion, justice, and respect for life. Philosopher Rosalind Hursthouse acknowledges that abortion raises complex ethical issues, but emphasizes that choosing life over death is more consistent with the virtues that define good moral character.³⁴

2.2 RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPERMISSIBILITY OF ABORTION

Religious traditions across the world have significantly shaped the moral discourse on abortion, with many presenting it as an impermissible act due to the sanctity and inviolability of human life. While theological doctrines vary, a common thread in many religious traditions is the belief that life begins at conception or very early in the womb, and that the unborn child possesses a moral and spiritual status that merits protection.

³² The Holy Bible, New International Version. Biblica, 2011.

³³ John Paul II. (1995), *Evangelium Vitae* [The Gospel of Life]. (Italy: Vatican Publishing), p. 100.

³⁴ Hursthouse, R. (1991), “Virtue Theory and Abortion.” *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 20(3), 223–246.

In Christianity, especially within the Roman Catholic tradition, abortion is explicitly condemned as a grave moral sin. The Catholic Church teaches that human life is sacred from the moment of conception, as every human being is made in the image of God and is known by God even before birth. In *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II affirms that “the deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always morally evil and can never be licit”³⁵. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also declares that abortion “constitutes a grave offense” and is equivalent to homicide. This view reflects the Church’s unwavering stance on the sanctity of life and its opposition to moral relativism regarding reproductive choices.

Islamic teachings also largely regard abortion as impermissible, though with some nuanced exceptions. According to the majority of Islamic scholars, life begins at conception, but the soul (ruh) is believed to be breathed into the fetus at 120 days (based on Hadith traditions). Abortion after this point is strictly forbidden unless the mother’s life is at risk. Even before this stage, abortion is generally disapproved of, as it is seen as an interruption of Allah’s creative process. The Qur’an does not explicitly mention abortion, but it strongly condemns the killing of innocent life: “Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you. Surely, killing them is a heinous sin”³⁶. The emphasis on divine providence and trust in God's plan underpins the moral rejection of abortion in most Islamic jurisprudence.³⁷

³⁵ John Paul II. (1995) *Evangelium Vitae* [The Gospel of Life]. (Italy: Vatican Publishing), p. 58.

³⁶ Qur’an (17:31), (2004), translated by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem. (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

³⁷ Rahman, F. (1989), *Health and Medicine in the Islamic Tradition*, (New Jersey: Crossroad Publishers), p, 43.

In Judaism, abortion is viewed with moral seriousness, though not entirely prohibited in all circumstances. Traditional Jewish thought places great value on human life, but the fetus is not considered a full person (*nefesh*) until birth. Nevertheless, elective abortion is not encouraged and is usually only permitted when the mother's life is in danger. The Talmud (Mishnah Ohalot 7:6) permits abortion if the fetus endangers the mother's life, interpreting the mother's life as paramount. However, once the baby's head has emerged during birth, it gains equal status, and abortion becomes prohibited. This reflects a tension between protecting potential life and preserving actual life, yet within a framework that still sees abortion as a morally weighty decision, not a matter of personal convenience.

In African Traditional Religion (ATR), while formal scriptures are lacking, the sanctity of life is upheld through cultural and spiritual beliefs. Children are seen as gifts from the ancestors and the spiritual world. Consequently, terminating a pregnancy is considered an affront not only to life but also to the spiritual order. Among many African societies, abortion is a taboo and is thought to bring misfortune or ancestral wrath upon individuals or communities. Life is viewed as communal and sacred; thus, abortion is considered a disruption of divine will and social harmony³⁸. Across these religious traditions, abortion is largely viewed as impermissible not simply because of legalistic codes, but due to a deep theological conviction about the value and sacredness of life. While nuances and exceptions exist—particularly in cases involving the life of the mother the general consensus holds that abortion is morally wrong and incompatible with

³⁸ Mbiti, J. S. (1969), *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann), pp. 49-51.

divine law and human dignity. These perspectives continue to influence contemporary debates, particularly in societies where religion plays a central role in public ethics and policy.

2.3 LEGAL PERSPECTIVES ON ABORTION RESTRICTIONS

The legal perspectives on abortion restrictions vary significantly across jurisdictions, reflecting divergent philosophical, moral, religious, and cultural understandings of personhood, bodily autonomy, and the role of the state. At the heart of legal restrictions on abortion lies the tension between protecting the rights of the unborn and safeguarding the reproductive autonomy of the woman. In many legal systems, abortion laws seek to strike a balance between these competing interests, often resulting in nuanced and context-dependent regulatory frameworks.

In many countries, particularly those with strong religious or conservative political traditions, abortion is highly restricted or outright criminalized. For instance, in Nigeria, the legal position on abortion is derived from the Criminal and Penal Codes, which prohibit abortion except where it is necessary to save the life of the mother. Under the Criminal Code (applicable in southern Nigeria), Section 228–230 criminalizes the act of procuring an abortion by a woman or anyone assisting her, while under the Penal Code (applicable in the north), abortion is also treated as an offense unless performed to preserve the woman’s life³⁹. This restrictive legal stance reflects Nigeria’s deeply religious and culturally conservative society, in which abortion is perceived as morally unacceptable.

Internationally, legal restrictions on abortion often hinge on the interpretation of constitutional rights and international human rights law. In the United States, the landmark decision in *Roe v.*

³⁹ Center for Reproductive Rights. *The World's Abortion Laws*. <https://reproductiverights.org>

Wade once established a woman's constitutional right to abortion under the right to privacy. However, this was dramatically overturned by the 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision, which returned the authority to regulate abortion to individual states. This shift marked a profound legal retreat from federal abortion rights and reignited intense legal battles across U.S. states, with some enacting near-total bans while others expanded access.⁴⁰

Legal restrictions often take the form of gestational limits, mandatory counseling, parental consent for minors, and waiting periods. These measures are legally justified on grounds such as the state's interest in protecting potential life, ensuring informed consent, and preserving medical ethics. In many European countries, abortion is legal within the first trimester but becomes increasingly restricted thereafter. For example, in Germany, abortion is technically illegal under the Penal Code (§218) but is decriminalized within the first 12 weeks if the woman undergoes mandatory counseling and observes a waiting period.

From a legal-theoretical standpoint, debates over abortion laws also engage the question of legal personhood at what point the fetus acquires legal rights. Some legal scholars argue that granting full personhood status to the fetus undermines women's autonomy and reproductive rights, while others contend that the law must protect the most vulnerable human lives, including those in utero. The absence of consensus on this issue continues to fuel legal controversies and judicial inconsistencies globally. Legal perspectives on abortion are also shaped by international human rights frameworks. Instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and general comments from the United Nations

⁴⁰ Greenhouse, L. & Siegel, R. B. (2022), Before (and After) *Roe v. Wade*: New Questions About Backlash. *Yale Law Journal*, 2022.

Human Rights Committee have increasingly emphasized that overly restrictive abortion laws violate women's rights to health, dignity, and bodily autonomy. Nevertheless, implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in countries where local laws and cultural norms override international obligations.

2.4 THE RIGHT TO LIFE OF THE FETUS: MORAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The question of the fetus's right to life is central to the moral and ethical debates surrounding abortion. At the heart of this issue is the recognition or denial of the moral status of the fetus, and whether it possesses rights comparable to those of born human beings. Ethical arguments against abortion frequently rest on the principle that human life, in whatever stage of development, is intrinsically valuable and worthy of protection. One of the most prominent moral frameworks that support the fetus's right to life is deontological ethics, particularly as developed by Immanuel Kant, which emphasizes the inherent worth of human beings. While Kant himself did not explicitly address abortion, the principle that humans must be treated as ends in themselves⁴¹ has been interpreted by many ethicists to extend to the fetus if it is considered a human subject. According to this perspective, to end the life of a fetus is to treat it merely as a means to an end thus violating its dignity and moral worth.

⁴¹ Kant, I. (1785), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by H. J. Paton. (New York: Harper & Row), p. 67.

From a natural law standpoint, which heavily influences Catholic moral thought, life begins at conception and is part of the natural order established by God. Thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas argue that all living beings have a purpose, and for humans, that purpose is the fulfillment of life through reason and moral action. Accordingly, interfering with the process of human development through abortion is viewed as a moral transgression because it subverts the natural teleology of human life⁴². The fetus, by virtue of its potential and ontological status as a human being, has a natural right to life that ought to be safeguarded.

Philosopher Don Marquis presents a secular and widely discussed ethical argument in his essay "*Why Abortion is Immoral*" He argues that what makes killing wrong is that it deprives an individual of a "future like ours" a future filled with experiences, activities, and enjoyment. On this basis, abortion is considered immoral because it similarly deprives the fetus of its potential future.⁴³ This argument sidesteps debates over personhood and instead hinges on the value of the fetus's future, making it applicable even to those who do not attribute full personhood to the fetus. Critics argue that the moral status of the fetus cannot be automatically equated with that of a born human. Judith Jarvis Thomson, in her famous essay "*A Defense of Abortion*" , accepts that the fetus might have a right to life but contends that this right does not automatically override the rights of the woman to control her body.⁴⁴ She uses analogies, such as the "famous violinist" scenario, to illustrate how one person's right to life does not entail a right to use another person's body without consent. From this standpoint, while the fetus may have moral value, it does not

⁴² Finnis, J. (2011), *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 45.

⁴³ Marquis, D. (1989), "Why Abortion Is Immoral." *The Journal of Philosophy*, 86(4), 1989, 183–202.

⁴⁴ Thomson, J. J. (1971), "A Defense of Abortion." *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 1(1), 47–66.

necessarily have rights that trump those of the pregnant woman. There are also gradualist perspectives, which argue that the moral status of the fetus increases as it develops. According to this view, early-stage fetuses do not possess full moral rights, but as they develop consciousness, viability, and the capacity to feel pain, their right to life becomes more morally significant⁴⁵. This view attempts to mediate between absolute pro-life and pro-choice positions by advocating for nuanced moral consideration that varies across gestational stages.

Despite differing ethical frameworks, a recurring theme in arguments supporting the fetus's right to life is the emphasis on potentiality, the idea that because the fetus has the potential to become a fully developed human being, it deserves moral and legal protection. Critics of this view often counter that potentiality does not confer actual rights, as moral personhood requires characteristics such as sentience, self-awareness, or rationality, which a fetus lacks in its early stages.

2.5 CRITIQUES OF PRO-CHOICE ARGUMENTS

The pro-choice stance on abortion advocates for a woman's right to choose whether to terminate a pregnancy, emphasizing personal autonomy, reproductive rights, and bodily integrity. However, this position has faced significant moral, ethical, and philosophical critiques from various perspectives. Critics of the pro-choice position often argue that it overlooks the moral status of the fetus, reduces human life to mere individual choice, and fails to adequately consider the

⁴⁵ Steinbock, B. (1992), *Life Before Birth: The Moral and Legal Status of Embryos and Fetuses*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 213.

societal and ethical implications of abortion. This section examines some of the most prominent critiques of pro-choice arguments, focusing on their ethical, moral, and societal concerns.

A central critique of pro-choice arguments is that they fail to give adequate moral consideration to the fetus. Pro-life proponents argue that the fetus, from the moment of conception or at least at a certain stage of development, possesses intrinsic moral value and the right to life. Critics contend that pro-choice advocates often dismiss or downplay the potential humanity of the fetus, treating it as a mere extension of the woman's body rather than as a developing human life with its own moral rights⁴⁶. These critics assert that acknowledging the fetus's moral status is essential, as its right to life may supersede the woman's right to autonomy, especially when the fetus reaches a point of viability. For example, Don Marquis argues that abortion is immoral because it deprives the fetus of a future similar to that of an adult human, a life filled with experiences, relationships, and the fulfillment of its potential. From this perspective, even if the fetus does not possess full personhood, the act of abortion robs it of the opportunity to live a valuable life, which makes the moral status of the fetus morally significant.

Another critique of pro-choice arguments centers around the idea that the pro-choice stance places an overemphasis on individual autonomy at the expense of moral responsibility and the value of life. Critics argue that pro-choice advocates prioritize the pregnant woman's right to choose over the moral obligation to protect the potential life growing inside her⁴⁷. In this view, the pro-choice argument often assumes that individual autonomy is the highest moral value,

⁴⁶ Marquis, D. (1989), "Why Abortion Is Immoral." *The Journal of Philosophy*, 86(4),183–202.

⁴⁷ Kaczor, C. (2011), *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life, and the Question of Justice*, (London: Routledge), p. 23.

neglecting the fact that decisions about abortion also affect the fetus and, in many cases, society at large.

Some critics argue that the logic of the pro-choice movement, which focuses on individual freedom, opens the door to ethical relativism where anything can be justified as long as it serves the interests of the individual. According to this critique, the pro-choice movement fails to address the ethical implications of terminating a pregnancy for reasons other than medical necessity, such as social, economic, or personal convenience. Kaczor suggests that placing autonomy at the forefront of the abortion debate leads to a diminished respect for the sanctity of life.⁴⁸

A further critique comes from concerns about a slippery slope, where the normalization of abortion could lead to a devaluation of human life more broadly. Critics argue that legal abortion sets a precedent for accepting the idea that human life can be terminated for convenience or without sufficient moral justification⁴⁹. The logic of abortion, critics suggest, could be extended to other forms of life, leading to justifications for infanticide, euthanasia, or other forms of killing in cases where life is deemed "unwanted" or "inconvenient." This critique is particularly prominent in discussions around late-term abortions, where the fetus may be capable of surviving outside the womb. Critics argue that allowing late-term abortions weakens the moral argument against infanticide and raises questions about when, if ever, it is acceptable to end a human life. In their view, the pro-choice argument fails to account for the broader societal implications of making abortion universally permissible, potentially eroding respect for human life in general.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁹ Harris, J. (1993), *The Value of Life: An Introduction to Medical Ethics*. (New York: Routledge), p. 56.

Critics of pro-choice arguments also point to the societal and psychological impact of abortion, arguing that it can have negative effects on both individuals and society. For instance, some argue that widespread access to abortion contributes to a cultural attitude of disposability and lack of responsibility toward life. Sociologists such as Charles Murray have suggested that the ease of abortion, particularly in countries where it is widely accepted, can reduce societal incentives for responsible sexual behavior and parenting. Additionally, psychological studies have shown that some women may experience feelings of regret, guilt, and emotional distress after an abortion⁵⁰. While these feelings do not apply universally, some critics argue that the pro-choice movement fails to adequately consider the long-term emotional and psychological consequences of abortion for women who undergo the procedure. In this context, critics suggest that the pro-choice argument often overlooks the complexity of the decision-making process and the potential harm it may cause to the woman in the long run.

Another critique of the pro-choice argument comes from its perceived inconsistencies with other areas of bioethics. For example, pro-choice advocates who emphasize a woman's autonomy and bodily integrity may paradoxically support restrictions on other forms of bodily autonomy in different contexts. Critics argue that pro-choice supporters may advocate for restrictions on practices such as assisted suicide, euthanasia, or organ donation—practices where individuals are allowed to make decisions about their own bodies. In this view, the pro-choice argument seems to

⁵⁰ Reardon, D. C. (2012), *Aborted Women: Silent No More*. The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life, and the Question of Justice, (London: Doubleday Publishers), p. 89.

operate with a double standard, favoring autonomy in the case of abortion but limiting it in other life-and-death decisions.⁵¹

CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON ABORTION

3.1 THE CONCEPT OF WOMEN'S BODILY AUTONOMY AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The concept of women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights is grounded in the principle that women have the inherent right to make decisions regarding their own bodies without external coercion or interference. Bodily autonomy refers to the fundamental human right of every individual to govern what happens to their body, including the right to consent to or refuse medical treatment, sexual activity, and other bodily interventions. For women, this right extends to decisions about reproductive health, including whether and when to become pregnant, access to contraception, abortion, and maternal healthcare⁵². The idea is rooted in broader frameworks of human rights and gender equality, emphasizing that control over one's body is central to the realization of personal freedom and dignity.

⁵¹ George, R. P. (2011), "The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion, and Morality in Crisis". *National Review*, 4(1), 67-98.

⁵² Cook, R. J., Dickens, B. M. & Fathalla, M. F. (2003), *Reproductive Health and Human Rights: Integrating Medicine, Ethics, and Law*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 21.

Reproductive rights, as a subset of bodily autonomy, encompass a range of entitlements related to reproduction and reproductive health. These include the right to access safe, effective, and affordable contraception; the right to legal and safe abortion; the right to quality maternal healthcare; and the right to education and information on reproductive health. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), reproductive rights are essential for achieving gender equality and empowering women. They assert that “reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children”⁵³. Without the ability to make such choices, women’s health, education, and economic opportunities are often constrained. Bodily autonomy is not merely a personal or medical issue but also a socio-political concern that reflects broader power dynamics within society. Patriarchal systems have historically undermined women’s autonomy by subjecting their bodies to control through cultural norms, legal restrictions, and institutional practices. In many societies, women are denied access to reproductive services or are coerced into reproductive decisions by family members, religious institutions, or the state. For instance, laws that prohibit or severely restrict access to abortion represent a direct violation of bodily autonomy, as they compel women to carry pregnancies against their will⁵⁴. Similarly, forced sterilization, denial of contraception, and lack of comprehensive sex education are all forms of reproductive injustice that disproportionately affect marginalized women.

⁵³ UNFPA. (2019). *State of World Population 2019: Unfinished Business – the pursuit of rights and choices for all*. United Nations Population Fund. <https://www.unfpa.org/swop>

⁵⁴ Zampas, C. & Gher, J. M. (2008), *Abortion as a human right: International and regional standards*. *Human Rights Law Review*, 8(2), 249–294.

The struggle for reproductive rights has been a central feature of feminist movements globally. Feminists argue that control over reproduction is essential to women's liberation, as it enables them to participate fully in society, pursue education and careers, and avoid the health risks associated with unwanted pregnancies. The landmark case of *Roe v. Wade* (1973) in the United States, which recognized a woman's constitutional right to abortion, was seen as a significant advancement for women's autonomy. However, the recent reversal of *Roe* in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) has sparked renewed debates about the extent to which bodily autonomy is protected under law, revealing the fragility of reproductive rights even in developed democracies. Access to reproductive health services is also a matter of public health. When women are denied these services, the consequences are often severe: increased maternal mortality, unsafe abortions, and poor health outcomes for both mothers and children. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that approximately 295,000 women died during and following pregnancy and childbirth in 2017, most of which could have been prevented with adequate healthcare⁵⁵. These deaths are not only a violation of the right to life but also indicative of the systemic neglect of women's health needs in many regions.

3.2 FEMINIST THEORIES AND THEIR POSITIONS ON ABORTION RIGHTS

⁵⁵ WHO. (2019). *Maternal mortality*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality>

Feminist theories provide diverse and insightful perspectives on the issue of abortion, generally grounded in the broader struggle for women's autonomy, gender equality, and bodily integrity. While not all feminists agree on every aspect of abortion rights, there is a strong consensus across most feminist strands that access to safe and legal abortion is a fundamental component of women's reproductive freedom. Feminist positions on abortion are primarily shaped by the understanding that restricting access to abortion not only undermines women's control over their own bodies but also perpetuates systemic gender inequality.

1. **Liberal Feminism:** Liberal feminism champions individual rights, legal equality, and personal freedom. In this framework, the right to abortion is considered a matter of personal liberty and privacy. Liberal feminists argue that just as men have full authority over their bodies, so too should women have the right to make decisions about pregnancy without state interference⁵⁶. They emphasize that forced pregnancy is a violation of a woman's autonomy and freedom, and therefore, the state must guarantee legal access to abortion as part of its commitment to gender equality and human rights.

2. **Radical Feminism:** Radical feminism views patriarchy as the root of women's oppression and sees control over women's reproductive capacity as a central tool of that oppression. From this perspective, the restriction of abortion rights is not just a matter of state policy but a manifestation of patriarchal control over women's bodies and sexuality (Firestone, 1970). Radical feminists often critique medical institutions, the legal system, and religious bodies as male-dominated

⁵⁶ Tong, R. (2009), *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (3rd ed.), (New Jersey: Westview Press), p. 45.

structures that deny women reproductive self-determination. Thus, for radical feminists, access to abortion is a means of breaking free from patriarchal domination and achieving full liberation.

3. **Marxist and Socialist Feminism:** Marxist and socialist feminists analyze abortion rights through the lens of class and economic power. They argue that reproductive freedom is unattainable without addressing the socio-economic structures that disadvantage working-class and marginalized women. In many societies, even where abortion is legal, economic barriers can make it inaccessible. These feminists stress that poor women often suffer most from abortion restrictions, facing unsafe procedures and social stigma⁵⁷. Therefore, they call not only for legal access but also for free and publicly funded abortion services as part of broader social justice.

4. **Intersectional Feminism:** Intersectional feminism, which emerged from critiques of mainstream feminism's neglect of race, class, sexuality, and other identities, provides a more nuanced view of abortion rights. It highlights how women's experiences with abortion vary based on intersecting oppressions. For example, Black, Indigenous, and immigrant women often face unique barriers, including systemic racism in healthcare, poverty, and immigration restrictions⁵⁸. Intersectional feminists argue that reproductive justice, a term coined by women of color activists, must go beyond the right to abortion and include the right to have children, to parent them in safe environments, and to access comprehensive reproductive healthcare.

⁵⁷ Eisenstein, Z. (1979), *Capitalist patriarchy and the case for socialist feminism*, (Cambridge: Monthly Review Press), p. 67.

⁵⁸ Crenshaw, K. (1991), Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.

5. **Ecofeminism:** Ecofeminists link the domination of women with the exploitation of nature, critiquing population control rhetoric that blames overpopulation on women's reproduction. While many ecofeminists support abortion rights as a matter of bodily autonomy, they are critical of coercive population policies disguised as environmentalism. They emphasize that empowering women through education, economic opportunity, and voluntary reproductive choices is a more ethical and effective path to sustainability⁵⁹. Thus, ecofeminism supports abortion rights but places them within a broader ecological and ethical context.

3.3 THE IMPACT OF ABORTION RESTRICTIONS ON WOMEN'S HEALTH AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Restrictions on abortion have far-reaching consequences on women's physical health, mental well-being, and socioeconomic status. These limitations, whether in the form of outright bans, mandatory waiting periods, or limited access to clinics, create significant barriers that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, particularly low-income women, adolescents, and women of color. The impact is not merely medical but also social and economic, as abortion restrictions shape women's autonomy, career opportunities, and long-term quality of life.⁶⁰

From a health standpoint, abortion restrictions increase the likelihood of unsafe procedures. In regions where abortion is heavily restricted or illegal, women often resort to clandestine or self-managed abortions, which carry higher risks of complications such as hemorrhage, infection, and

⁵⁹ Warren, K. J. (1990), The Power and the promise of ecological feminism. *Environmental Ethics*, 12(2), 125–146.

⁶⁰ Guttmacher Institute. (2022). *Abortion Worldwide: Uneven Progress and Unequal Access*. <https://www.guttmacher.org>

death. According to the World Health Organization, unsafe abortions are a leading cause of maternal mortality, with approximately 7 million women hospitalized each year due to complications from unsafe procedures.⁶¹ The impact is even more pronounced in low-resource settings where access to skilled medical care is limited. Studies have shown that legal restrictions do not significantly reduce abortion rates; instead, they push abortions underground and compromise women's health outcomes.⁶²

Mental health is also adversely affected by abortion restrictions. Denial of abortion services has been associated with increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation. The Turnaway Study, a longitudinal study conducted in the United States, revealed that women who were denied abortions experienced worse mental and physical health outcomes compared to those who obtained them.⁶³ These women were more likely to remain in abusive relationships, suffer from chronic pain, and report lower self-esteem. The psychological toll of being forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term can be long-lasting and detrimental to overall well-being.

Socioeconomically, abortion restrictions hinder women's ability to pursue education, maintain stable employment, and achieve financial independence. When women are unable to make reproductive choices freely, their life trajectories are often altered significantly. For instance,

⁶¹ World Health Organization. (2019). *Preventing unsafe abortion*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/preventing-unsafe-abortion>

⁶² Sedgh, G. Bearak, J. Singh, S. et al. (2016), Abortion incidence between 1990 and 2014: Global, regional, and subregional levels and trends. *The Lancet*, 388(10041), 258–267.

⁶³ Biggs, M. A. Upadhyay, U. D. McCulloch, C. E. & Foster, D. G. (2017), Women's mental health and well-being 5 years after receiving or being denied an abortion. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 74(2), 169–178.

women denied abortions are more likely to experience poverty, rely on public assistance, and raise children in economically insecure households. A study by Foster et al. found that women who were denied an abortion were nearly four times more likely to live below the federal poverty level than those who were able to obtain one.⁶⁴ This socioeconomic strain extends to the children as well, who often face lower educational outcomes and higher rates of poverty.

Abortion restrictions also reinforce systemic inequalities. Marginalized groups, especially Black, Indigenous, and Latina women, are disproportionately affected due to structural barriers in healthcare access, racial discrimination, and economic disparities. These women are more likely to live in areas with limited reproductive health services and are less able to travel or take time off work to access out-of-state care. Therefore, while wealthier women may still access abortion through private means or by traveling, poorer women bear the brunt of restrictive laws, leading to what has been termed “reproductive injustice”.⁶⁵

3.4 THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, CLASS, AND RACE IN ABORTION DEBATES

The discourse surrounding abortion is often shaped not only by ethical, religious, and political arguments but also by the deeply rooted intersections of gender, class, and race. These social categories do not operate in isolation; rather, they converge to produce distinct experiences and forms of inequality that affect how different groups of women access, experience, and are

⁶⁴ Foster, D. G. Biggs, M. Ralph, A. Gerdtz, L. C. Roberts, S. & Glymour, M. M. (2018), Socioeconomic outcomes of women who receive and women who are denied wanted abortions in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*, 108(3), 407–413.

⁶⁵ Ross, L. J. & Solinger, R. (2017), *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*, (California: University of California Press), p. 44.

impacted by abortion and reproductive healthcare. Intersectionality, a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes that social identities and systems of oppression intersect to produce unique forms of discrimination. In abortion debates, this framework is essential for understanding how gendered oppression intersects with economic disadvantage and racial inequality, thereby exposing structural injustices that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.⁶⁶

Gender is central to the abortion debate, as it directly concerns the autonomy and rights of women over their own bodies. Patriarchal societies often seek to regulate women's reproductive choices as a means of controlling female sexuality and reinforcing traditional gender roles. Women's bodies become battlegrounds for ideological conflicts about morality, family, and national identity. Restrictions on abortion perpetuate the notion that women's primary role is to bear and raise children, often at the expense of their agency, aspirations, and health. The lack of access to abortion services denies women the ability to make essential decisions about their futures and reinforces gender inequality by limiting their educational, economic, and political opportunities.⁶⁷

However, it is not gender alone that shapes abortion experiences—class plays a critical role in determining access. Wealthier women often have the means to navigate restrictive laws, including traveling across state or national borders, paying out-of-pocket for private healthcare, or accessing information and legal resources. In contrast, low-income women are more likely to be affected by geographical barriers, lack of childcare or transportation, and reduced access to health

⁶⁶ Crenshaw, K. (1991), Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.

⁶⁷ Ross, L. J. & Solinger, R. (2017), *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*, (California: University of California Press), p. 11

insurance or paid leave. These economic constraints make it significantly harder for poor women to access timely and safe abortions. Consequently, abortion restrictions do not eliminate abortions; they merely create a two-tiered system where affluent women have access, and poor women suffer the consequences of forced pregnancies or unsafe procedures.⁶⁸

Race further complicates the landscape of abortion access and rights. In many countries, and particularly in the United States, women of color, especially Black, Indigenous, and Latina women, face structural racism within the healthcare system. They are more likely to live in underserved areas, have lower incomes, and experience discrimination in medical settings. Historical injustices such as forced sterilization, unethical medical experimentation, and the criminalization of Black motherhood have created a deep mistrust in reproductive healthcare institutions. Today, these legacies continue through disproportionate maternal mortality rates and limited access to reproductive services. As a result, the abortion debate for women of color is not just about individual choice but also about reproductive justice, which demands the right to have children, not have children, and raise children in safe environments⁶⁹. When gender, class, and race intersect, they expose the unequal burden of abortion restrictions. For instance, policies such as waiting periods, mandatory ultrasounds, or parental consent laws may appear neutral but often have disproportionate impacts on young, poor, and racially marginalized women. These laws can lead to delays that increase medical risks, or they may deter women from seeking abortions

⁶⁸ Foster, D. G. Biggs, M. A. Ralph, L. Gerdt, C. Roberts, S. & Glymour, M. M. (2018), Socioeconomic outcomes of women who receive and women who are denied wanted abortions in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*, 108(3), 407–413.

⁶⁹ SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective. (2020). *What is Reproductive Justice?* <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice>

altogether. Furthermore, the stigmatization of abortion in media and policy discussions often portrays low-income women and women of color as irresponsible or immoral, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and justifying punitive measures against them⁷⁰. Criminalization of abortion or pregnancy-related outcomes, such as miscarriage, has also disproportionately targeted women of color, highlighting how racial and class biases influence enforcement.

The pro-life vs. pro-choice binary often fails to capture these intersecting oppressions. While mainstream feminist movements have traditionally emphasized the right to choose, reproductive justice advocates argue that choice is a privilege not available to all women equally. Without addressing the social, economic, and racial barriers that constrain choice, abortion rights advocacy remains incomplete. A reproductive justice framework moves beyond legal access to consider the broader conditions under which reproductive decisions are made, emphasizing the need for equitable healthcare, education, housing, and protections from state violence.⁷¹

3.5 CASE STUDIES: FEMINIST ADVOCACY FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Feminist advocacy for reproductive rights has played a crucial role in shaping policies, raising awareness, and challenging oppressive structures that limit women's autonomy over their bodies. Across different global contexts, feminist movements have fought for the recognition of reproductive rights not just as a matter of choice but as an essential component of gender equality, health, and human rights. These case studies from different parts of the world illustrate how

⁷⁰ Roberts, D. E. (1997), *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. Vintage Books), p. 67.

⁷¹ Ross, L. J. & Solinger, R. (2017), *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*, (California: University of California Press), pp. 47-49.

feminist activism, through legal battles, grassroots organizing, public education, and coalition building has been instrumental in expanding and protecting reproductive freedoms.

1. The United States: *Roe v. Wade* and the Women's Liberation Movement

One of the most iconic examples of feminist advocacy for reproductive rights is the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion nationwide. Feminist groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Women's Health Movement were pivotal in creating public discourse around abortion as a civil rights issue. They reframed abortion not as a moral failure but as a matter of bodily autonomy and equality. Feminists argued that without control over their reproductive lives, women could not fully participate in society, education, or the workforce⁷². Although *Roe* was overturned in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, feminist advocacy has continued to mobilize around reproductive justice, with renewed energy focused on state-level protections and support for marginalized communities.

2. Ireland: Repeal the 8th Movement

Ireland presents a powerful case of grassroots feminist advocacy leading to constitutional change. For decades, the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution (1983) effectively banned abortion, equating the life of the fetus with that of the mother. In response, feminist organizations such as

⁷² Luker, K. (1984), *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, (California: University of California Press), p. 87.

the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC), the Coalition to Repeal the 8th, and the national feminist group ROSA mobilized a nationwide movement to challenge this law. The tragic death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012—after being denied a life-saving abortion—galvanized public outrage and intensified feminist activism. Feminists employed storytelling, art, social media, and street protests to raise awareness and humanize the issue. In 2018, following sustained advocacy, 66.4% of Irish voters supported the repeal of the Eighth Amendment, marking a monumental victory for reproductive rights.⁷³

3. Argentina: The Green Wave Movement

Argentina's feminist “Green Wave” (*La Marea Verde*) represents one of the most vibrant and successful reproductive rights movements in Latin America. For years, abortion in Argentina was only legal in cases of rape or danger to the mother's life. Feminist groups like the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe and Free Abortion pushed for broader legalization through annual mobilizations, legislative lobbying, and massive public demonstrations. Dressed in green handkerchiefs, activists created a powerful visual identity that spread across the continent. After years of advocacy, the Argentine Congress passed a law in December 2020 legalizing abortion up to 14 weeks of pregnancy. This victory was celebrated globally and inspired similar movements in countries like Colombia and Mexico.⁷⁴

4. Nigeria: Feminist Coalitions and Unsafe Abortion Awareness

⁷³ Side, K. (2020), Repealing Ireland's Eighth: Gendered Narratives and the Public Politics of Abortion. *Feminist Review*, 124(1), 100–117.

⁷⁴ Kane, G. (2021), The Green Tide: Feminism and Reproductive Rights in Latin America. *Latin American Perspectives*, 48(1), 134–150.

In Nigeria, abortion remains highly restricted, permitted only to save a woman's life. However, feminist advocacy groups such as the *Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre (WARDC)* and *Ipas Nigeria* have worked tirelessly to raise awareness about the consequences of unsafe abortions, which are a leading cause of maternal mortality in the country. These groups combine community-based education with legal reform campaigns, challenging the stigma surrounding abortion and advocating for reproductive justice. Though progress has been slow due to strong religious and cultural opposition, feminist efforts have led to improvements in post-abortion care services and increased dialogue about the public health implications of restrictive abortion laws.⁷⁵

5. Poland: Black Protests Against Abortion Bans

In Poland, feminist activists have faced significant challenges due to one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe. In 2016 and again in 2020, mass protests known as the "Black Protests" erupted after the government attempted to impose near-total abortion bans. Thousands of women dressed in black took to the streets in cities across Poland, supported by feminist groups like the *Polish Women's Strike* and *Federation for Women and Family Planning*. Their activism drew international attention and succeeded in delaying or moderating legislative changes. Although the 2020 Constitutional Tribunal ruling tightened abortion access, feminist advocacy has continued through legal support services, underground networks, and international solidarity campaigns.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Adebayo, S. B. & Nwala, D. (2020), *Unsafe abortion and maternal mortality in Nigeria: The role of feminist health advocacy*. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 28(56), 1–9.

⁷⁶ Zalewski, P. (2021), Poland's Abortion Protests: Feminist Resistance Against Rising Authoritarianism. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 28(2), 234–240.

6. South Africa: Legal Reform and Feminist Engagement

South Africa legalized abortion under the *Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act* in 1996, one of the most liberal abortion laws in Africa. This was largely due to the efforts of feminist legal scholars, women's health activists, and anti-apartheid women's organizations who linked reproductive rights to the broader struggle for human rights and democracy. Post-apartheid South Africa recognized the need to address the country's high maternal mortality rates and gender inequalities. Feminist advocacy has since focused on ensuring that legal rights are translated into accessible services, particularly in rural and underserved communities. Organizations like *Women's Legal Centre* and *Section27* continue to monitor implementation and provide legal support to women denied access to care.⁷⁷

3.6 KANTIAN ETHICS AND THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Immanuel Kant, one of the most influential philosophers in Western moral thought, developed a deontological ethical theory grounded in reason and autonomy. At the center of Kant's moral philosophy is the Categorical Imperative, a foundational principle that determines moral duty independent of consequences. Unlike consequentialist theories such as utilitarianism, which evaluate actions based on outcomes, Kantian ethics judges actions by their adherence to duty and universal moral laws. For Kant, to act morally is to act according to principles that one can rationally will to become universal laws.

⁷⁷ Mehretu, A. (2019), Access to Abortion Services in South Africa: Feminist Legal Perspectives. *Journal of African Law*, 63(2), 217–235.

The Categorical Imperative is Kant's method for determining whether a maxim (a personal rule of action) is morally permissible. It is "categorical" because it applies universally and unconditionally, regardless of personal desires, emotions, or interests. This contrasts with hypothetical imperatives, which are conditional and apply only if one desires a particular result. Kant writes: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"⁷⁸. This Formula of Universal Law tests whether one's action could be universalized without contradiction. For example, if everyone lied when it was convenient, trust would collapse, and the very practice of lying would be incoherent hence, lying is morally impermissible.

Another significant formulation of the Categorical Imperative is the Formula of Humanity, which states: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end, and never merely as a means"⁷⁹. This formulation emphasizes human dignity and respect for rational beings. According to Kant, each individual possesses intrinsic worth and moral autonomy and must never be used solely as a tool for another's purposes. This has profound implications for issues like exploitation, coercion, and injustice. For example, deceiving someone to gain a benefit treats that person merely as a means and is thus immoral. Kantian ethics also highlights autonomy and moral law. Morality, for Kant, is not imposed externally but arises from the rational will of the individual. A moral agent must act not out of emotion or external influence but from respect for moral law, which one freely

⁷⁸ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 69.

⁷⁹ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 429.

recognizes through reason. Thus, true moral action comes not from inclination or fear of punishment but from duty doing the right thing for its own sake. This makes Kant's theory non-relativistic, as morality is rooted in rational principles that apply universally to all rational beings⁸⁰.

3.6.1 The Formula of Universal Law

The Formula of Universal Law is one of the most foundational formulations of Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative, articulated in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. It reads: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"⁸¹. This principle provides a universal test for the morality of actions by examining whether the rule (or maxim) guiding one's action could be consistently applied to everyone, without contradiction.

In this formulation, a maxim refers to the subjective principle of action—the personal rule or intention behind one's behavior. Kant requires that, before acting, an individual must ask: "What if everyone acted according to the same rule?" If the universalization of the maxim leads to a contradiction in conception or contradiction in the will, then the action is morally impermissible.

There are two main types of contradiction in Kant's framework:

⁸⁰ Wood, A. W. (2008), *Kantian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 56.

⁸¹ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 421.

1. **Contradiction in conception** – This occurs when the universalization of a maxim would undermine the very possibility of the action itself. For example, lying promises become impossible if everyone lies because trust, which underpins promising, would be destroyed.
2. **Contradiction in the will** – This happens when the universalized maxim does not contradict itself logically but would conflict with a rational will's interests. For instance, the maxim "*Do not help others when they are in need*" may not be logically self-defeating, but a rational agent could not will this to be a universal law, since they might need help someday.

Kant insists that moral principles must be objective, necessary, and universal binding for all rational agents. The Formula of Universal Law upholds these criteria by demanding that one only act according to rules that could govern everyone consistently. In doing so, Kant rejects moral relativism, where actions are judged based on individual or cultural preferences, and consequentialism, where the morality of actions is determined by their outcomes. Instead, he promotes a deontological ethic, grounded in duty and reason.⁸²

The significance of the Formula of Universal Law lies in its emphasis on impartiality and moral consistency. It demands that individuals rise above personal inclinations and consider the broader moral law. This provides a rational basis for condemning actions like lying, stealing, and breaking promises, not because of their consequences, but because they fail the test of

⁸² Allison, H. E. (1990), *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 59.

universalizability. At the same time, it guides individuals toward duties such as honesty, fidelity, and beneficence, since these maxims can be universally willed without contradiction.

However, critics argue that the application of the Formula of Universal Law can sometimes be ambiguous or overly formalistic. Some claim that it allows room for manipulation by how maxims are framed for instance, narrowly specifying a maxim to pass the universality test. Nevertheless, Kant and later scholars like Onora O'Neill emphasize that maxims must be formulated honestly and generally, with the moral agent taking responsibility for their universal implications.

3.6.2 The Formula of Humanity as an End

The Formula of Humanity as an End in Itself is one of the most profound and influential formulations of Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative. Presented in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, this formulation states: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end, and never merely as a means"⁸³.

At its core, this principle emphasizes the intrinsic worth and dignity of every human being. According to Kant, rational beings possess a unique moral status because they have the capacity for autonomous action, meaning they can legislate moral law for themselves through reason. This capacity for rational self-governance grants human beings a special moral value that is not contingent upon external conditions or outcomes. As such, humans must be treated as ends in

⁸³ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 429.

themselves, not as mere tools for achieving someone else's goals⁸⁴. To treat someone merely as a means is to use them without regard to their own rational will, such as through deception, coercion, exploitation, or manipulation. For instance, lying to someone for personal gain treats them as a mere instrument of one's interests, without respecting their capacity to make informed decisions. In contrast, to treat someone as an end is to recognize and respect their autonomy, taking their goals and interests seriously and allowing them to participate freely in decisions that affect them.⁸⁵

3.6.3 Moral Duty and Autonomy

In Kantian ethics, moral duty and autonomy are central and interdependent concepts. Immanuel Kant developed a moral philosophy in which duty is not derived from external authorities or consequences but from the rational will of the individual. His deontological framework asserts that the moral worth of an action lies in its motivation that is, whether it is performed out of respect for the moral law rather than inclination or self-interest.⁸⁶

Moral duty, for Kant, refers to the obligation to act according to the Categorical Imperative, the supreme principle of morality. Unlike hypothetical imperatives, which command conditionally (e.g., "If you want to pass, study hard"), categorical imperatives command unconditionally and universally. A moral agent performs their duty not because of the consequences of the act, but

⁸⁴ Wood, A. W. (2008), *Kantian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 67.

⁸⁵ O'Neill, (1989), *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press), p. 109.

⁸⁶ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 119.

because it is the right thing to do, grounded in reason and universalizable law. Kant writes, “*Duty is the necessity of acting from respect for the law*”.⁸⁷ Thus, moral actions are those done from duty, not in accordance with duty out of ulterior motives.

The connection between moral duty and autonomy lies in Kant’s claim that freedom is the condition for the moral law, and conversely, the moral law is the condition for true freedom. In obeying the moral law, we are not subject to an external command but are exercising our rational freedom. Kant writes, “*A free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same*”⁸⁸. This reveals that freedom and duty are not in opposition, but harmonize in the moral agent who acts from reason. Kantian autonomy has far-reaching implications, especially in contemporary debates on ethics, politics, and human rights. The emphasis on treating individuals as ends in themselves, because they are autonomous moral agents, underpins liberal political philosophy and modern conceptions of human dignity. It also has influenced fields such as medical ethics, where respect for patient autonomy is a foundational principle. For example, informed consent in healthcare honors the Kantian idea that individuals must never be used merely as means, but must make rational, voluntary decisions about their own bodies.⁸⁹

3.6.4 Kant’s View on Moral Agency and Potential Life

⁸⁷ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 400.

⁸⁸ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 447.

⁸⁹ O’Neill, O. (1989), *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant’s Practical Philosophy*. (Cambridge University Press), pp. 121-123.

Immanuel Kant's ethical framework offers a rigorous account of moral agency, which is central to his moral philosophy. According to Kant, moral agency is defined by the capacity for rational deliberation, autonomy, and adherence to moral law. A being is a moral agent if it possesses rationality and the ability to act according to the Categorical Imperative, rather than out of mere inclination or instinct⁹⁰. For Kant, morality is not about outcomes but about acting from duty, and only beings capable of understanding and acting from duty qualify as moral agents. This strict conception of moral agency has important implications for debates about potential life, particularly concerning the moral status of fetuses and embryos. Kant himself did not explicitly address abortion or fetal rights, but his philosophy provides a framework for interpreting such issues. Since Kant associates moral worth with autonomous rationality, it follows that fetuses, which do not yet possess rational capacities or the ability to legislate moral law for themselves, are not moral agents in the Kantian sense. They are not capable of acting from principles or understanding moral duties, and therefore, do not possess moral agency⁹¹.

However, Kantian ethics does not necessarily imply that fetuses have no moral significance. While they may not be ends in themselves in the strict Kantian sense, they can be considered potential rational beings. Kant's commitment to the value of rational nature might suggest a duty to preserve the conditions for the development of rational life. This interpretation leads some Kantian scholars to argue that while a fetus is not yet a moral agent, it is still worthy of a certain level of moral consideration due to its potential to become one. Thus, ending a potential life must

⁹⁰ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 450.

⁹¹ Wood, A. W. (1999), *Kant's Ethical Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 78.

be weighed carefully, especially if it involves treating the fetus merely as a means to an end, such as convenience or personal preference. Kant's principle of human dignity entails that persons should never be used merely as means but always as ends in themselves. Applying this to the abortion debate, some argue that women should never be treated as mere vessels for reproduction, which would violate their autonomy and dignity. Feminist interpretations of Kant have highlighted that any ethical framework that overrides a woman's moral agency for the sake of preserving potential life risks objectifying her, something Kantian ethics fundamentally opposes.⁹²

3.6.5 Application of the Categorical Imperative to Abortion

Applying Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative to the issue of abortion presents a complex moral challenge, as it involves balancing respect for rational moral agency, the value of potential life, and the autonomy of the pregnant individual. The Categorical Imperative, as developed in Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, provides a universal moral law based on reason and duty. The most pertinent formulations of the Categorical Imperative for abortion debates are the Formula of Universal Law and the Formula of Humanity as an End in Itself.

Under the Formula of Universal Law "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"⁹³ one must assess whether the maxim underlying the choice to have an abortion could be universalized without contradiction. A possible maxim might be: "*When continuing a pregnancy poses significant hardship to a woman,*

⁹² Herman, B. (1993), *The Practice of Moral Judgment*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 91.

⁹³ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 454.

she may choose to terminate it."⁹⁴ The question is whether this maxim, if adopted universally, would undermine the moral order or lead to contradictions in conception or in the will. Since not all pregnancies would be terminated and the maxim does not negate the value of life itself, some argue it could be universalizable without contradiction, particularly if based on considerations of preserving the woman's autonomy and health.

3.6.6 Kantian View on the Foetus as a Rational Being

In Kantian ethics, rationality and autonomy are the defining features of moral personhood. A being is morally considerable not simply because it is alive or biologically human, but because it possesses the capacity for rational self-legislation, the ability to act according to universal moral laws determined by reason. The question of whether a foetus can be regarded as a rational being, and therefore an end in itself under Kant's ethical system, is a matter of profound philosophical and moral complexity. According to Immanuel Kant, moral status is grounded in the possession of rational nature. In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he writes: "*Rational nature exists as an end in itself*"⁹⁵. This means that only those beings who can reason, deliberate, and act autonomously in accordance with the moral law are entitled to be treated as ends and not merely as means. The fetus, in its developmental stages, lacks these characteristics. It does not possess rational consciousness, cannot formulate maxims, nor can it act autonomously. Thus, from a strict

⁹⁴ O'Neil, O. (1989), *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 135.

⁹⁵ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 428.

Kantian standpoint, a foetus is not a moral person or a rational being in the technical sense required for full moral consideration as an “end in itself”.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, the question becomes more complicated when one considers the potential for rationality. A fetus is a developing human life, and unless interrupted, it has the natural capacity to become a rational being. Kant himself did not directly address this issue, but some contemporary Kantians argue that potentiality may entail moral consideration, albeit of a different kind from that given to actual rational beings. This perspective suggests that while a fetus does not yet qualify as a moral agent, its future capacity for rational thought may generate imperfect duties toward it. These duties, unlike perfect duties which are strict and universally binding, allow for moral discretion and depend on the circumstances.

Still, this does not necessarily elevate the fetus to the same moral status as a person. The actual possession of rational capacities, not merely the potential for them, is what grounds full moral status in Kant’s ethics. Therefore, a woman as an actual rational agent holds precedence in moral deliberation, particularly when her autonomy, health, or moral agency is at risk. To treat the fetus as having equal moral status would risk subordinating the woman’s rational will to that of a being that does not yet possess it, a move Kant would likely reject, as it would violate the principle of treating persons as ends in themselves.

3.6.7 Moral Conflict: Duty to the Foetus vs. Duty to the Self

⁹⁶ O’Neill, O. (1989), *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant’s Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge University Press), p. 149.

In Kantian ethics, one of the most complex moral dilemmas posed by abortion arises in the conflict between a pregnant woman's duty to the fetus and her duty to herself as a rational moral agent. This conflict challenges Kant's otherwise rigid and formal moral framework, which prioritizes adherence to universal moral law and respect for rational autonomy. While Kant himself did not explicitly discuss abortion, the implications of his moral theory allow for a meaningful exploration of the competing obligations involved in reproductive decisions. Kantian ethics centers on the Categorical Imperative, which commands that individuals act only on maxims that they can will to become universal law and that they treat humanity, in themselves and in others, always as an end and never merely as a means⁹⁷. Based on this, Kant insists on two interconnected moral obligations: the duty to respect others as rational beings, and the duty to preserve one's own moral integrity and dignity. This dual obligation can give rise to moral tension when a woman's ability to act autonomously is compromised by pregnancy, especially when continuing the pregnancy severely impacts her physical health, psychological well-being, or moral agency.

In a Kantian view, the fetus is not yet a rational moral agent, it lacks the capacities of reason, autonomy, and moral self-legislation that define personhood. However, it may be viewed as a potential rational being, and this potential may generate imperfect duties to preserve and protect its development. These duties are not absolute and may be outweighed by other more pressing obligations. On the other hand, the woman, as an actual rational agent, has a perfect duty to herself to protect her autonomy, health, and capacity to act according to moral law. Kant wrote in

⁹⁷ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 421-429.

The Metaphysics of Morals that “a man has a duty to himself not to debase the humanity in his own person”⁹⁸, indicating the moral imperative to maintain one’s dignity and moral agency. When the continuation of a pregnancy threatens the woman’s ability to live according to rational moral principles, by compromising her physical life, mental well-being, or ability to fulfill other duties, then abortion may be morally justified in Kantian terms. In such cases, the duty to oneself may override the imperfect duty to preserve potential life, particularly when fulfilling the latter would violate the former. Kant does not allow one to use oneself merely as a means to an end, including to an end like gestating a fetus, if doing so compromises one’s moral integrity.

3.6.8 Kant and the Notion of Personhood

In Immanuel Kant’s moral philosophy, the concept of personhood is central to understanding moral value, obligation, and dignity. Unlike biological or merely sentient definitions, Kantian personhood is rooted in rationality and autonomy, the capacity to legislate moral law for oneself through the use of reason. This emphasis on rational moral agency sets Kant’s account apart from many religious or utilitarian approaches that assign moral worth based on divine creation or the capacity to experience pleasure and pain. Kant defines a person as a being who is “an end in itself”, capable of moral reasoning and worthy of respect. In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he writes: “Rational nature exists as an end in itself... Hence, every rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will”⁹⁹. This

⁹⁸ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,), p. 435.

⁹⁹ Kant, I. (1996), *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (M. Gregor, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 429.

intrinsic worth what he terms dignity is what demands that persons never be treated merely as means, but always also as ends. The notion of personhood, therefore, is inseparable from moral law, autonomy, and the capacity to act out of duty.

For Kant, personhood does not begin simply with human life or biological existence, but with the capacity for practical reason. A human being becomes a person when they are capable of acting in accordance with rational moral principles. Therefore, infants, fetuses, or those who lack rational faculties temporarily or permanently may not fully qualify as “persons” in Kant's strict philosophical sense¹⁰⁰. This framework creates significant implications for ethical debates about abortion, euthanasia, and animal rights. In abortion, for instance, Kantian ethics suggests that a fetus, which lacks rationality and autonomy, is not yet a person and therefore does not hold the same moral status as the pregnant woman, who is an actual moral agent. Nevertheless, some Kantian scholars argue that the potential for rationality in fetuses demands a degree of moral consideration, though not necessarily full moral personhood.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY, EVALUATION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 SUMMARY

The abortion debate juxtaposes two morally weighty claims: that abortion is impermissible because it violates the moral worth of (potential) human life, and that women have a right to

¹⁰⁰ Held, V. (2006), *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 67.

bodily autonomy that can justify abortion. A Kantian approach brings distinct resources to this debate because Kantian ethics anchors moral worth in rational agency, universalizable duty, and the injunction to treat persons as ends in themselves rather than as mere¹⁰¹. Instead of weighing consequences, a Kantian inquiry asks whether the maxims behind actions could be willed as universal law and whether any party is being instrumentalized, questions that refract the abortion dispute in normative terms rather than consequentialist ones.¹⁰²

On the anti-abortion side, Kantian-inspired arguments emphasize the inviolability of human life and the duty to respect beings that instantiate or will instantiate rational agency. Some interpreters maintain that the fetus, as a developing human organism with the potential for rationality, warrants moral protection; to intentionally terminate that development, they argue, would be to adopt a maxim that could not be consistently willed as universal without disrespecting humanity as an end¹⁰³. From this vantage, abortion appears to instrumentalize a being with moral significance for the convenience or projects of another agent, an act Kantian ethics would view with deep suspicion.

Yet applying Kantian premises to abortion is philosophically fraught because Kant's account connects moral personhood to capacities associated with rational agency. Critics therefore question whether a fetus, particularly in early gestation, meets the criteria for full moral subjecthood; if moral worth depends on actual rational capacities, potentiality alone may not

¹⁰¹ Kant, I. (1785). *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (A. Wood, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 79.

¹⁰² Wood, A. W. (1999). *Kantian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 101.

¹⁰³ Marquis, D. (1989). Why Abortion is Immoral. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 86(4), 183–202.

ground the same weight of rights¹⁰⁴. This complicates any categorical prohibition derived from Kant: duties toward potential persons plausibly differ in strength from duties toward actual rational agents, and the metaphysical and empirical question of when rational agency begins becomes decisive for moral adjudication.

A robust Kantian defense of women's rights turns the theory's emphasis on autonomy inward: Kantian autonomy is the capacity to legislate moral law for oneself, and it is the source of human dignity¹⁰⁵. From this perspective, compelling a woman to continue an unwanted pregnancy can constitute a coercive denial of her status as an end, an infringement on her capacity for self-legislation and practical deliberation. Feminist Kantians argue that respecting women as ends requires honoring their considered choices about their bodies, lives, and life projects, especially when pregnancy profoundly affects those projects and when social conditions, poverty, lack of healthcare, or gender inequality, distort genuine consent.¹⁰⁶

Classical philosophical contributions from outside strict Kantianism further sharpen the debate in ways that Kantian thinkers must address. Judith Jarvis Thomson's famous violinist thought experiment defends a right to bodily autonomy even when the fetus is granted moral significance, by showing cases where bodily entitlement can outweigh claims of dependent life¹⁰⁷. Mary Anne

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, R. (2007). Kantian Ethics and the Moral Status of the Fetus. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 4(2), 153–172.

¹⁰⁵ Hill, T. E. (2006). *Respect, Plurality, and Justice: Kantian Perspectives*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 90.

¹⁰⁶ Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, (California: University of California Press), p. 69.

¹⁰⁷ Thomson, J. J. (1971). A Defense of Abortion. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 1(1), 47–66.

Warren's analysis of personhood argues that moral personhood requires cognitive and social capacities that fetuses lack, thereby undercutting claims that fetal potential alone should trump a woman's autonomy¹⁰⁸. These interventions force Kantian analyses to reckon with scenarios where duties to potential lives and duties to present persons come into direct conflict.

Several nuanced Kantian positions attempt reconciliation between protecting nascent human worth and preserving women's autonomy. One conciliatory strategy distinguishes duties to potential versus actual persons, claiming that while potential life deserves moral consideration, it rarely and only in special circumstances outweighs the claims of a present rational agent—especially early in pregnancy or where the woman's autonomy is threatened by coercive conditions¹⁰⁹. Another strategy reframes Kantian obligation at the level of social policy: rather than demanding an absolute ban on abortion, Kantian reasoning could require societal structures that respect both forms of value, by minimizing coercion, improving social supports for pregnant women and parents, and ensuring that choices are genuinely free¹¹⁰.

Finally, the Kantian framework has concrete implications for law and public policy that turn on how the moral status of the fetus is interpreted and how autonomy is safeguarded in practice. If Kantian reasoning privileges duties toward potential life, the law might adopt restrictive measures aimed at protecting fetal development. If, however, Kantian ethics gives lexical priority to the autonomy of actual rational agents (or at least requires robust protections of their deliberative

¹⁰⁸ Warren, M. A. (1973). On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion. *Monist*, 57(1), 43–61.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, R. (2007). Kantian Ethics and the Moral Status of the Fetus. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*, 4(2), 153–172

¹¹⁰ Wood, A. W. (1999). *Kantian Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 119.

capacities), policy would favor protecting women's rights to decide, accompanied by social measures that lessen the need for coercive choices. In either case, Kantian ethics emphasizes respect, either for nascent human worth or for the woman's autonomy, which requires careful institutional design rather than simplistic legal formulas.¹¹¹

In essence, a Kantian approach to the impermissibility of abortion versus women's rights does not produce an automatic verdict but instead highlights the tension between duties to potential human life and duties to actual rational agency. The most persuasive Kantian responses are those that (1) critically examine the metaphysical claims about personhood and potentiality, (2) differentiate the force of duties to potential versus actual persons, and (3) insist that respecting persons as ends demands social and legal structures that protect autonomy while treating nascent life with appropriate moral concern. Thus, Kantian ethics supplies principled tools both to critique permissive stances on abortion and to construct reasoned defenses of women's rights, leaving the ultimate moral judgment contingent on how one adjudicates these several theoretical and empirical questions.

4.2 EVALUATION

The Kantian framework brings sharp moral tools to the abortion debate: concepts like the categorical imperative, universalizability, and the duty to treat persons as ends force a careful articulation of the reasons on both sides. Evaluating the impermissibility of abortion versus women's right to choose through a Kantian lens requires close attention to two core questions that Kantian ethics foregrounds, what counts as a moral person and what duties we owe to persons,

¹¹¹ Kant, I. (1785). *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (A. Wood, Trans.). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 89.

and to how those questions interact in messy, real-world contexts. A useful evaluation must therefore distinguish between the force of abstract moral principles and the practical implications of applying those principles to pregnant women, fetuses, families, and societies.

One strength of the Kantian case against abortion is its powerful defense of human dignity and the moral seriousness it attaches to the prospect of a rational life. If one reads Kant as requiring that beings who instantiate or will instantiate rational agency must not be treated merely as means, then intentional termination of a developing life looks morally troubling: it appears to instrumentalize what may become a bearer of moral worth. The universalizability test also supplies an intuitive check, asking whether a maxim permitting abortion could be willed as a universal law forces opponents to state and justify the principles underlying permissive practices rather than merely appealing to convenience or preference.

At the same time, applying Kant's account strictly to prohibit abortion runs into deep conceptual questions. Kantian moral status is tightly connected to rational agency and autonomy, and a fetus, especially at early stages, lacks the capacities commonly associated with full personhood. This raises a tension: if moral worth is tied to capacities that are not yet present, does potentiality alone create duties of the same weight as duties to actual persons? The uncertainty about when and how potentiality translates into present moral claims undermines any simple, categorical prohibition derived from Kantian premises.

Kantian commitments give strong moral resources for defending women's right to choose. Autonomy, for Kant, is not merely freedom of action but the capacity to legislate moral law for oneself; the denial of that capacity through coercion or instrumentalization is a profound moral wrong. Forcing a woman to continue a pregnancy against her considered judgment can therefore

be construed as treating her as a means to ends she does not endorse, thereby violating her dignity. Framing abortion as, among other things, an autonomy-protecting measure reframes the debate away from a narrow biological focus toward the status and agency of actual moral persons.

However, the autonomy-focused defense has limits when pushed to extreme formulations. Autonomy is powerful, but Kantian ethics also insists on duties and the moral community; absolutizing autonomy can risk ignoring other moral considerations that deserve weight, such as duties to protect life that may be owed even to those who are not yet fully rational agents. Moreover, autonomy is meaningful only in context: if social and economic conditions systematically undermine genuine choice, appealing to autonomy alone can be hollow unless those background injustices are addressed. In short, autonomy gives a necessary but not always sufficient ground for policy or moral verdicts. Feminist critiques sharpen these practical and theoretical limits by showing that Kant's abstract model of the autonomous agent does not easily capture the relational, embodied, and socially embedded realities of pregnancy. Women's decision-making about pregnancy is often shaped by power, dependence, and social roles; Kantian formalism must therefore be supplemented with attention to social justice if it is to treat women as ends in ways that are substantive rather than merely formal. Recognizing relational autonomy, how agency is exercised within relationships and institutions, presses Kantians to consider not only individual choices but the structures that enable or disable genuine moral self-legislation.

Turning from theory to practice, a Kantian evaluation yields divergent policy implications depending on which Kantian commitment is emphasized. A focus on protecting nascent life would recommend strong legal protections and social measures oriented toward preserving fetal

development; a focus on protecting autonomy would recommend legal access to abortion combined with institutional supports to ensure choices are free from coercive pressures. The most plausible Kantian-inspired policy posture, however, is a middle path that treats restrictions on abortion as morally significant and in need of robust justification while prioritizing remedies that preserve women's status as autonomous moral agents, through comprehensive healthcare, economic supports, and measures that reduce coercion.

Reconciling the competing Kantian intuitions often involves carefully tiered moral reasoning: recognizing some moral weight to fetal potentiality without granting it automatic lexical priority over the rights and dignity of actual persons; insisting on high burdens of justification for legal restrictions; and allowing exceptions in extreme cases where a woman's life or deeply held moral agency is at stake. Such an approach requires transparent moral criteria for when and why the state may legitimately constrain autonomy, and it requires societal commitments to remove non-moral barriers that distort truly autonomous choice.

4.3 CONCLUSION

The impermissibility of abortion from a Kantian perspective rests firmly on the inviolability of human dignity and the moral law. Kant's philosophy, particularly his principle of treating humanity as an end in itself and never merely as a means, places strong emphasis on the protection of potential life. The fetus, regarded as a being with inherent worth, is seen as deserving of respect, regardless of its stage of development. Thus, abortion, by terminating life, is considered a violation of the moral duty to preserve and respect human existence.

On the other hand, women's rights, especially the right to autonomy, bodily integrity, and freedom of choice, bring forward a serious ethical tension. Women argue that the ability to make decisions regarding their reproductive health is fundamental to their dignity, equality, and freedom. The Kantian framework, however, struggles to fully reconcile these claims with the moral weight attached to the fetus, as the duty to respect life may outweigh personal autonomy when a conflict arises.

Therefore, the Kantian approach creates a moral hierarchy where the duty to protect life is prioritized above individual choice, thus reinforcing the impermissibility of abortion. Yet, this position has been criticized for its rigidity and its inability to adequately address complex circumstances such as cases of rape, incest, or threats to the mother's life. Nevertheless, the Kantian view serves as a crucial contribution to ethical debates, challenging society to consider

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the Kantian approach to the impermissibility of abortion versus women's rights, certain recommendations can be made to create a more balanced moral framework:

1. **Promote Comprehensive Ethical Dialogue:** While Kantian ethics emphasizes duty and the sanctity of life, it is important to foster dialogue that considers both the moral status of the fetus and the rights of women. Ethical discourse should encourage a balanced evaluation that does not dismiss women's autonomy but also does not trivialize the moral worth of the fetus.
2. **Incorporate Contextual Sensitivity:** Kant's rigid framework could be adapted to consider exceptional circumstances, such as cases of rape, incest, or severe medical risks.

In these contexts, women should not be forced into decisions that gravely endanger their dignity or survival. Ethical systems grounded in Kant's philosophy may evolve by applying the categorical imperative with a broader view of moral duties to both the woman and the fetus.

3. **Strengthen Preventive Measures:** Since Kantian ethics stresses the prevention of moral wrongs, policies should focus on preventing unwanted pregnancies through comprehensive sex education, access to contraceptives, and improved healthcare. This approach reduces the moral conflict by addressing the root causes that often lead to abortion.
4. **Support for Women's Welfare:** If abortion is to be deemed impermissible within a Kantian framework, society has a duty to ensure that women receive adequate support, social, economic, and psychological, during pregnancy and after childbirth. This ensures that women are not treated merely as means to an end, but as dignified beings whose rights are safeguarded.
5. **Encourage Ethical Responsibility:** Kant's emphasis on duty can be applied to encourage both men and women to take moral responsibility in matters of reproduction. Responsibility should not fall solely on women; rather, men must also uphold duties of care, respect, and support in reproductive decisions.

While Kantian ethics emphasizes the impermissibility of abortion by upholding the sanctity of life, its application in contemporary society requires adaptation to respect women's rights and lived realities. By integrating contextual considerations, preventive measures, and comprehensive

support systems, Kantian philosophy can be made more responsive and humane in addressing the moral complexity of abortion.

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