

Christian Ethics:  
Research Paper

Robert Theis

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## Ethical Issue:

This research paper will cover the topic of abortion and the ethical issues surrounding if, what is in the womb, should be considered a human life, and if it is, what ethical issues arise from that finding.

To start, I would like to address why I chose this topic. To be upfront with my personal bias, I believe what is in the womb is a human life. I am also a Christian. Because I am both a Christian and I believe what is in the womb is a human life, I hold to the belief that the life in the womb is innocent and deserves protection. Protection meaning, the right to life. If a situation were to arise where the life of the mother and the life inside the womb were both at stake, medical staff should attempt to save both lives.

Prior to this class, I watched an interview with Neil Degrasse Tyson. To paraphrase a section of the interview, the interviewer asked Dr. Tyson if a man can become a woman, scientifically. This was asked during the time transgenderism was in the news and “transgender women” were competing in women’s sports. Dr. Tyson refused to answer the question, instead making the argument that politics and laws are dictated by the answer. This answer angered me. He was asked as question about the science but refused to answer because it could have political ramifications. I felt if someone holds to the idea that science can lead us to truth, they should not let policy dictate that truth. If they are, then they are not seeking truth.

Realistically, a paper like this can go on indefinitely due to “What if” questions. Because of this, I hope to limit and address the primary question, “Is, what is in the womb, a human life?” I will then look at those findings in relation to three methodologies, Natural Law Theory, Natural Rights Theory, and Divine Command Theory. I will also look at four sets of passages in

scripture. I will then conclude by briefly looking at these findings in a pro-choice and pro-life light.

## Scripture:

There were a great many passages to choose from when it came to scripture. Due to translational issues along with differing contextual views, some people view scripture as being OK with abortion, in a sense. That sense being, some people see certain passages as not assigning Imago Dei, the “Image of God,” to what is in the womb. Some people see the difference in penalties of the law being different for the unborn vs the born. While these four passages may not address every issue, they will hopefully shed light on the topic of the unborn and its value.

For the sake of clarity, I will include chapter and verse, and a snippet from the passages for reference.

### **Genesis 1:26–28 (ESV)**

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.”

Derek Kidner in TOTC: Genesis states, “Man is portrayed as in nature and over it.” He then goes on to talk about term, “in our image, after our likeness.” Kidner states, “at a single stroke, it imprints on the mind the central truth about us.” Kidner goes on to point out that there is no “and” between the two phrases, and scripture does not make them distinct expressions.

Another scholar, Michael Eaton, points out that “each age tends to read its own ideas into the ‘image of God’.” Because of this, he concludes that “each age interprets ‘God’s image’ in terms of its own interests!” His commentary put the various opinions into these four groups:

1. One group consists of those who think the image of God is some spiritual quality in human beings, such as self-consciousness, understanding of the eternal, capacity for thought, personality and vitality.
2. Another group contained those who thought the image of God had a connection with rule over creation.
3. A third approach stressed direct relationship with God.
4. A fourth group stressed physical shape.

He suggests uses these four methods to help determine what “image” meant:

1. One way of considering the image of God is to remind ourselves of how the idea is used in the New Testament.
2. Another way of considering the image of God is to recall how God has been described in Genesis 1:1–25.
3. Next we consider the image of God in 1:26.
4. Another way of considering the image of God is to remember how ‘images’ were used in the ancient world.

A summary of his conclusions is that the whole person is the image of God, including the body.

He details that God is Spirit, according to scripture, but it does mean that God chose the physical form we are. He brings up an interesting point by saying, “Israel was forbidden to make an image of God because the human race itself is to be the image of God.” He goes on to explain that idea helps us to understand why life is sacred. “The fact that human beings are the inimage of God makes murder a various serious sin.” He goes on to point out that capital punishment was required for murder due to the seriousness of that crime.

The Faithlife Study Bible had a section on Genesis 1:27 saying, “Being created in the image of God distinguishes people from all other earthly creation.” It then states, “God’s image is not described as being possessed in part or given gradually; rather, it is an immediate and inherent part of being human.”

### **Exodus 20:13 (ESV)**

#### **13. “You shall not murder.**

According to the HALOT, the use of murder here is defined as:

- To murder (to murder, kill, crush)
- Someone who has committed homicide:
  - Act with premeditation, meaning murderer
  - Acting without premeditation (as with homicide, found in city of refuge)

Per the Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee:

- To kill, to break – lists a breaking in pieces, as breaking in my bones.

The Hebrew root (rasah) used in the Decalogue brings into question if it is intended only for premeditation. Numbers 35 details people killed accidentally, showing it is not only for premeditation. All but one case shows it as man’s crime against man. The exception is in Proverbs 22:13, which is an example of (rasah) used for animal vs man.

Luke 1:41, 44 (ESV)

41: “When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb.”

44: “the baby in my womb leaped for joy.”

In the FaithLife Study Bible, it writes, “John leaps in Elizabeth’s womb at the sound of Mary’s voice because Mary is pregnant with Jesus.” With the Life Application New Testament

Commentary, for verse 1:41, it reads, “The Holy Spirit made Elizabeth suddenly aware of both Mary’s pregnancy and the identity of Mary’s baby.” It goes on to say, “Only the Holy Spirit could have revealed this to Elizabeth.” It also states, “Under inspiration of the Spirit, Elizabeth interpreted the movement in her womb as the child’s joy at hearing Mary’s greeting. Elizabeth repeated that Mary was blessed because she believed that the Lord would do what he said.”

Likewise, In the TNTC Luke, it also affirms that “under His [Holy Spirit] inspiration interpreted the movement as the expression of her unborn baby’s joy,” when referring to Elizabeth’s baby in the womb. A further point made by TNTC Luke is between Elizabeth’s inspired knowledge of Jesus and Mary, and John’s absence of that knowledge. “Apparently Elizabeth’s recognition that he is Lord was inspired, but personal. John had to find it out for himself.”

Exodus 21:22-25 (ESV)

22. When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman’s husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine.

23. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life,

24. eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

25. burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

This translation is different depending on the translation used. In verse 22, the following versions translate it as follows:

- ESV: hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm
- NRSV: injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows
- NIV: hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury

The NRSV translates the Hebrew used as “miscarriage,” whereas the ESV translates it as, “children come out” and the NIV translate it as, “gives birth prematurely.” The Merriam-Webster

dictionary defines miscarriage as, “spontaneous expulsion of a human fetus before it is viable and especially between the 12th and 28th weeks of gestation.” Using the translation for miscarriage brings with it the implication that the baby, or “fetus” according to Merriam-Webster, did not survive.

The FaithLife Study Bible references the blow by saying, “The blow caused the woman to give birth prematurely. The wording of the case leaves a great deal of ambiguity over whether the penalties for causing injury relate to the health of the woman, the survival of the infant, or both.”

According to John Hannah in BKC, “Also the unborn fetus is viewed in this passage as just as much a human being as its mother; the abortion of a fetus was considered murder. A person’s physical loss by injury was to be punished by a similar loss to the offender (vv. 24–25), the law of retaliation (cf. Lev. 24:19–20; Deut. 19:21). This law was designed to restrict the exacting of punishment to what was equitable.” John Hannah makes note of the use of “fetus,” while expressing that it would be considered murder. He also notes the context of the passages that follow are for punishment. Life for life, would for would, etc.

According to Alan Cole in the TOTC Exodus:

A woman with child: only accidentally involved in the men’s brawl (unless she intervenes to protect her husband, like the woman of Deut. 25:11). But nevertheless, if there is a miscarriage, monetary compensation must be paid. It has sometimes been claimed by those in favour of abortion that the unborn child is not really considered as an individual here: but that is not the point of this passage, which is primarily concerned with injury to the woman. The destruction of the unborn child was regarded by the Hebrews as an instance of the most barbarous cruelty, calling down God’s judgment (2 Kgs 15:16).

## Primary Methodology: (1-2)

Natural Law Theory uses the premise that all humans share a common, unchanging nature. Boyd and Thorsen summarize the basic elements in the following ways:

1. All humans share a common nature.
2. Moral principles are grounded in that shared nature.
3. The basic moral principles cannot change (unless human nature changes).
4. These principles direct humans to their proper ends or goods.
5. All people know what the basic moral principles are.

These fall into three main groupings, rational, social, and bodily. When determining moral worth or morality using Natural Law Theory, it is not invented or imposed arbitrarily, but determined from the shared nature through, what Thomas Aquinas calls, “natural light of reason.”

With Natural Law Theory, there are primary and secondary precepts, which are rules intended to regular behavior or thought. Boyd and Thorsen list the primary precepts as the “precepts that do not change and are binding on all people.” They list the secondary as precepts, but those that are not binding in every situation. The quote Thomas Aquinas as saying, “we must always practice justice.”

Boyd and Thorson include a cast study on human sexuality. This study talks about the telos, a “natural end,” for a behavior. It goes on to state human sexuality is, “essentially for the purpose of procreation,” showing the link between sexual union and procreation.

Where Natural Law Theory works in relation to Christian ethics is that both have intellectual credibility. Both can be used for outreach and to point to common morals. An example might be

murder, as both frameworks state that murder is wrong, while the Christian can point to God and Natural Law Theory can point to human conscience.

## Secondary Methodologies: (2-3)

Natural Rights Theory is a framework described as the idea that there are rights and that those rights are “self-evident.” Self-evident being that they are to be protected by government and society. Boyd and Thorson address this framework as reason alone revealing the “law of nature,” indicating that all humans are equal and independent. John Locke being widely regarded as the founder of the modernist theory of natural rights. All humans are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. Those rights being, “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Although “God-language” is used, it does not abide by the Christian theory specifically, as this applies to all people of all religions.

Locke refers to social contracts being key, through consent. He claims the state of nature proves to be unstable, leading to theft and violence. With the consent to a contract, born into or remaining in the society, they agree on a set of rules and laws.

The case study here involves the topic of abortion. A few key quotes are areas of focus involve Noonan saying, “if you are conceived by human parents, you are human.” The case study looks at “personhood” as an alternative when defining life. Judith Jarvis Thompson argued that even if the baby in the womb is a person, the rights of that person does not outweigh the rights of the mother wanting to kill it. This chapter, within the case study, says, “The most foundational of all the rights is the right to life since without it there can be no other rights.”

I find this framework useful when combined with Christian ethics because they both start with a Creator. While it is true that the Natural Rights theory does not prescribe to the Christian Creator,

there are certain morals and rights that run in parallel. Because of this, if the result is the same, the Christian can use both lines of reasoning to reach the same end goal.

Divine Command Theory is a framework that grounds itself in God's commands. This theory is the most self-evident as to why it would be a good framework to use with Christian ethics.

Morality is defined by God and His commandments, giving morality no foundation for opinion.

This framework seems to go against the modern view of "You have your truth and I have my truth." With Divine Command Theory there is only God's Truth.

This framework emphasizes *creatio ex nihilo*, meaning, "creation from nothing." It implies that we are all God's creation. This chapter refers to God's omnipotence, noting it is not subject to an external source or standard. God alone is the basis for obligation. It points to a person's conscience, while morally binding, is not infallible. The case study challenges this idea with examples like Abraham and Isaac. This framework uses examples like this to look at when to have an intervention, when we should allow exemptions, and looking at conscience.

Integration: (3-4)

Conclusion: (1-2)

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