

## An Application of an Ethics of Virtue to the Issue of Abortion

Much ethical theory has recognized that the very importance of the attempt to live an ethical life lies in the fact that in acting the individual forms herself or himself either for the better or for the worse. That is, each and every human act, each act stemming from the deliberate choice of the human agent determines the type of human being an individual is, or in other words, the kind of moral character which an individual has. Then, in turn, the moral character which one has influences what decisions one makes. For those who share this perspective, one of the foremost questions to be asked by the moral agent in determining the rightness or wrongness of an act is: What kind of person will I become if I do this act?

Ethical reasoning of this sort is distinguished from other kinds of ethical inquiry because it focuses on the agent; it is variously known as ethics of the agent, ethics of virtue, or ethics of character. This is not to say that those who are concerned with an ethics of character are not also concerned with other means of determining the rightness or wrongness of an act. An ethics of character can be combined with nearly any means of evaluating an action. Yet, for an ethics of character the question of the effect of an act upon the character of the agent is one of the primary considerations taken into account in evaluating whether or not an action is moral.

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Socrates was one of the first to make the effect of an action upon moral character an essential feature of his ethical thought. In the *Gorgias* he argues that "It is better to have harm done to you, than to harm another." He argued that it is better to have another do injustice to you than to do injustice to another because one harms one's own soul through doing injustice; this is a worse harm than any suffering which one may experience at the hands of another. Not many are as rigorous as Socrates, but central to an ethics of virtue is the view that one needs to be careful about what one does to one's moral character. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, stated the basic premise of an ethics of virtue in these precise terms: "For a given kind of activity produces a corresponding character. This is shown by the way in which people train themselves for any kind of contest or performance: they keep on practicing for it. Thus, only a man who is utterly insensitive can be ignorant of the fact that moral characteristics are formed by actively engaging in particular actions." (1114a) In this view, an individual should avoid telling lies, for instance, not only because it harms the truth, because it harms another who deserves the truth, because it creates distrust in society, but also because in lying, the individual does harm to her or his moral character; lying serves to mold one's character in the direction of being an untrustworthy person.

Although an ethics of character had been neglected for some time by moral theorists, there has recently been a resurgence of interest in an ethics of character. Most of the interest has involved the attempt to define just what an ethics of character is. More specifically, it has involved the attempt to describe what virtues are and what vices are, for these are the qualities which define moral character. Momentarily this paper will join the effort to offer a description of an ethics of character. But this paper will go a step further and attempt to evaluate a specific action in accord with the criteria provided by an ethics of character. Most virtue ethicists concentrate on virtues and vices and on the role of society in promoting these; they do not attempt to evaluate the effect that specific actions would have on an individual's character. The claim here is that an ethics of virtue assists in helping us determine the morality of specific actions. Here I shall first select what I hope is a less controversial action, adultery, and show briefly how an analysis based on virtue illuminates the moral status of adultery, and then I shall take up the very controversial topic of abortion--and in a way which will undoubtedly be

controversial.

### An Ethics of Virtue

An ethics of virtue is also referred to as an ethics of character, in view of the fact that in acquiring virtues or acquiring vices one is also forming one's character. One is acquiring a certain character which helps determine how one will behave in the future. For example, consider a man who begins to cheat on his wife. With each decision to commit adultery, he commits adultery more easily. Most likely he also performs other actions more easily which he may consider morally wrong or dubious. For instance, he may have begun to lie to his wife and now tells lies more easily; his actions are a result of the type of character he has been forming for himself. Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics explained how an individual formed his or her moral character, by drawing upon his favorite analogy of health. He said that much in the same way that one who enjoyed good health might gradually become ill through dissolute living, so, too, one might through a series of unjust or selfish acts gradually become an unjust and selfish person. He used this analogy to demonstrate that even if one does not intend to acquire the characteristics which a certain act fosters, one will nonetheless be molded by the choices which one makes.

It must also be noted that individuals are not always fully responsible for the moral character which they have. Aristotle repeatedly stresses the importance of a good upbringing for helping one form a good moral character (e.g. 1095b). For instance, individuals who as children have been raised to act responsibly and fairly are much more likely to be responsible and fair adults. Conversely, those who have been spoiled and indulged may grow up to be self-centered and greedy adults; their parents may be greatly responsible for their moral character, but they are the ones who they suffer the effects of being selfish and greedy.

An ethics of character also posits that one of the best ways to acquire virtues is to imitate one who has them. Aristotle tells us that if we wish to become just we should imitate those who are just; if we wish to be brave we should imitate those who are brave. This way of reasoning suggests that one way to determine the rightness or wrongness of an act is to consider if someone with the virtues which we admire would consider performing the action under consideration. An axiom in this regard could perhaps be formulated thusly: if you want to know what are just (brave, gentle, etc.) acts, observe a just (brave, gentle, etc) individual. And conversely, if you want to know if an action is moral, consider the moral character of the individuals who engage in this kind of action. Aristotle advises those who wish to become moral to observe how those who they recognize as moral behave and to imitate them. For instance, an individual may recognize that generosity is a virtue and wish to cultivate this virtue. However, she may be confused about whether giving money to winoes is a generous act. Aristotle would advise this individual to observe or consult with someone he believed to be generous, for this would be an effective way of determining whether giving money to a wino is generous or not.

One reason that an ethics of character needs so much explanation and defense in our time is that there seems to be little consensus on what qualities are to be considered virtues and vices. An ethics of character assumes that there are some qualities or virtues which are beneficial for most men and women to have; the community is also generally seen as very instrumental in fostering these characteristics. Aristotle, in his study of ethics, relied enormously upon the views of the common man in drawing up the virtues or characteristics which a good person must have. Whether or not there is such a consensus today has

frequently been called into question, most recently and effectively by Alasdair MacIntyre in his After Virtue. In this text MacIntyre laments the difficulty of moral discourse in our fragmented and pluralistic age and observes that little agreement can be expected from ethicists since they generally are drawing from traditions which presuppose incompatible assumptions.

Although MacIntyre's caution is not to be dismissed lightly, it seems true to say that although most current ethical systems may have incompatible assumptions, perhaps some common ground can be found in terms of the qualities that all would like to have. Let us explore the possibility that even in our pluralistic and fragmented and politicized age a list of characteristics which most would laud as appropriate to a good human being could be compiled.

The first task must be the careful choice of words to designate the qualities or characteristics which constitute the goodness of a human being. What qualities would most agree that they would like to possess? Would not at least kindness, generosity, self-reliance, loyalty, commitment, responsibility, reliability, supportiveness, self-determination, sincerity, honesty, good-naturedness, trustworthiness, and self-discipline appear on the list of most people? Do we not also admire those who have reflected upon morality and show a concern for acting morally? We tend to admire those who can articulate and justify their reasons for their behavior and who act in accord with the moral principles they have accepted for themselves. We may observe that not many possess these qualities but we would agree that it would be good to have them. And to the question why people would want to possess these and other beneficial qualities, would not most of us say that having such qualities would enable us to function as we wish to function? That is, if we had these qualities, we would be able to accomplish what we wish to accomplish (given necessary external goods) and to have the relationships we would like to have--that is, we would be good co-workers, good friends, good spouses, and good parents. Do we not think that such individuals will make good moral decisions? We rely upon a just woman to do what is just, a generous man to do what is generous.

How do we judge who possesses these qualities? A common way of doing so is by observing how individuals act. That is, we deem some actions as generous and tend to think that those who consistently perform such actions are generous individuals. Thus, if we wanted to know if a given act is a generous act, we would ask one we knew to be generous if the act in question were one he or she would do. We also tend to judge an individual's moral character by assessing the kinds of reasons which an individual gives for his or her actions. One might say that he gives to charity because he wishes to help others; another might say that he wishes to impress others so that he might win public office. Because of the reasons given we would judge one individual to be generous, the other to be manipulative and perhaps a phoney.

### Adultery

Let me attempt an evaluation of adultery in these terms, before turning to the question of abortion. Keep in mind that this kind analysis does not purport to prove that adultery is wrong; its concern is to determine what are the moral characters of those who commit adultery, to answer the question if it is likely or usual for those with admirable moral characters to engage in adultery. However, if it is true that adulterers can be said to have undesirable moral characteristics and/or that they are forming undesirable moral characters through their choice to commit adultery, this would be taken as an indication at least--not a proof--that adultery is a morally wrong action.

For an analysis in accord with an ethics of virtue, answers to the following questions would be

useful; What sort of people generally commit adultery? Are they, for instance, honest, temperate, kind, etc.? What sorts reasons do they give for the actions which they choose? How do they assess their action? Do they understand themselves to be doing something moral or immoral with their choice? Why do adulterers choose to have sex with people other than their spouses? Are their reasons selfish or unselfish ones? Do they seem to speak of their reasons for their choice honestly or do they seem to be rationalizing? What sort of life have they been leading prior to the action which they choose; is it a life which exhibits the characteristics we admire?

Let us suppose that the ethicist might be able to make some generalizations about adulterers. He or she might observe that most who commit adultery are experiencing some difficulties in their marriages. Probably few enter marriage with the intention of committing adultery. They would find such an intention contrary to their commitment to their spouse. Most acts of adultery are most likely the result of a series of dissatisfactions, a series of choices, a series of "separations" from the marital relationship. Yet, given two individuals, both equally dissatisfied with their marriages, one who refuses to engage in adultery and the other who so chooses, the act of adultery by one signifies that he is a different "sort" of person than the other. Thus the individual's response to an opportunity for infidelity would suggest much about the person's character prior to the choice for or against adultery, and, perhaps, also gives some indication of the direction of the person's life after the choice.

It would also be valuable to know how adultery has affected the marriage of the adulterer, his or her relation to his or her children and other family members, his or her relations with co-workers, etc. We would be interested to learn if adulterers drank more, cheated on the job more, were estranged from their families. If we discovered that their lives showed such disarray, we may be able to conclude that these difficulties were connected with and grew out of certain qualities and were reinforced by the decision to commit adultery.

The example of adultery was chosen before the events in T.V. evangelizing and the events of the 1988 presidential campaign. But the fortunes or misfortunes of Mr. Bakker and Mr. Hart serve well to demonstrate the point which I am attempting to illustrate here. Why is it that Gary Hart withdrew from the race for the presidency? That Jim Bakker quit his ministry? Most news analyses which I have read or seen conveyed strongly the assessment that the American people did not feel they could trust an adulterer. They felt Gary Hart was lying to them about his relationship with Donna Rice; they felt he probably had to tell a few other lies to pursue the alleged affair; they were disappointed in his treatment of his campaign personnel who had worked hard for him and felt betrayed. Some observed, too, that his choice to engage in behavior which could be construed as adulterous indicated that he had bad judgment; that he didn't know what kind of behavior was expected of a candidate. Some observed that perhaps he was somewhat immature. Others charged that he was being inconsiderate of his wife, to say the least, if not cruel. One columnist argued that his action was exploitative of women who were, in his eyes, to be used as sex objects. Supporters of Jim Bakker had a similar reaction combined with the judgment that he seemed a great hypocrite.

Now, many of the people reasoning this way probably think adultery is wrong for a host of different reasons. Some may think it wrong because it involves breaking solemn vows; others may think it wrong because it was a violation of the love or at least trust which should exist between man and wife; others may think it an offense against God; others may have think that adultery must involve lies both to one's spouse and to the paramour involved; others may simply think it stupid for someone who is likely to get caught to be so careless. And certainly

some may think it wrong for all or a combination of the above reasons. Yet, even those who do not agree about why adultery is wrong and even those who think it is a moral choice on occasion may well agree that adulterers usually are not the finest of individuals. Indeed, those who think that adultery is a moral choice in some circumstances--unless they are complete nihilists--would still observe that suitable reasons must be given to justify committing adultery. Thus, although some might not feel comfortable saying that all adulterers are liars and unkind and unreliable, most may agree that some true generalizations could be made about adulterers which would lead us to think that in general adultery is not compatible with the moral virtues which we admire. If they were trying to instruct a young person about why not to be an adulterer, they may say, "Look at those who commit adultery. They tend to lie and sneak around and often it catches up with them. No one will trust them; they endanger their relations with their spouses, their families, their friends." Certainly, if someone told us that he or she wanted to be an honest, trustworthy, stable and kind individual with good family relationships, and wanted to know if an adulterous affair would conflict with this goal, we would have little hesitation in advising against adultery. This would be an argument against adultery based on the moral characteristics of those who commit the act of adultery. It amounts to saying, "Don't do that kind of action, because if you do, you will both demonstrate yourself to be a certain kind of person, and/or be on the path to becoming a certain kind of person, a kind of person who is not the kind of person you admire and aspire to be."

The judgments which we make about an adulterer's character are made without scientific studies about adulterous individuals. We come to these conclusions, it seems, from the moral lessons of our youth, from novels we have read, from experience with the adulterers we have known. Certainly, we may encounter those who think adulterers are fun-loving, life-embracing, and generous. With those who do not share our analysis of the character of adulterers, we would be interested in comparing the reasons for the differing judgments. But an ethics of character depends upon such judgments. It requires us to draw upon whatever information we have which will help us to judge human character and the effect of human actions upon human character.

Now, before we move to applying an ethics of character to abortion, let us establish some caveats about judging the character of others. The claim that any specific individual has such a character because he or she has performed a certain act has no necessary truth about it, for character is very dependent upon the reasons given for the choice made. We may hold that individuals who perform certain actions tend to do so for typical reasons and would need to determine if the individual we are considering is acting for the typical reasons. The best that we can say is that it is likely that individuals who perform certain actions have certain characteristics. If we can determine a specific individual's true reasons for making his or her choice, our evaluation would, of course, have greater accuracy. This is important, for it is easy to over-absolutize statements such as "adulterers are untrustworthy"; it is likely that it is so, but not certainly the case that it is so. Nor, of course, does the claim that adulterers are generally certain sorts of individuals entail that those who do not commit adultery are therefore individuals of admirable character. The reasons individuals have for not committing adultery may not be admirable ones (one may fear that one's rich spouse would cancel one's credit cards, for instance). Again, the reasons which one gives for one's action are of decisive importance.

### Abortion and Moral Character

Having established what an ethics of character is, having shown how one would apply it to

certain actions, and being armed with a few caveats about the limits of such application, let us consider the act of abortion in terms of an ethics of character. If the analysis of the connection between abortion and moral character is correct, it should help us in understanding the moral dimensions of abortion; it may even provide terms for fresh and fruitful discussion.

There is quite a remarkable amount of information available about women who have had abortions; perhaps no other moral action is as well documented from the perspective of the experience of the agent. The value of reading this material for one who wishes to get an idea of what enters into the abortion decision and the abortion experience is inestimable. Nearly all of this material has been compiled and evaluated by those who find abortion to be morally permissible, and thus, if it is biased in any way, it is biased in the direction of portraying abortion as a good action. Let me acknowledge my position on abortion, for admittedly this may enter some bias into my interpretation. I maintain that abortion is objectively a wrong action; it is my judgment that abortion involves the taking of an innocent human life. I believe that women do something seriously wrong when they choose to abort a pregnancy. Certainly, to some extent how one evaluates interviews of women who have had abortions is determined by what one thinks of abortion. Nonetheless, though there is certain to be some disagreement about how one is to assess the moral character of the women in these interviews, it is the judgment of this author that by and large many, even those who find abortion morally permissible, upon reading these interviews, would be disturbed by the quality of the moral character of the women having abortions and by the moral reasoning which informs the abortion decision. More precisely, I wish to show that the reasons which many women give for their abortion decisions are not reasons which most would find admirable or acceptable, again, even those who consider abortion morally permissible. The choice for abortion is not often, if ever, compatible with the list given above of those qualities which most of us admire and would like to have. Finally, I would also like to note that it is not only women who suffer harm to their moral characters through abortion. If the analysis given here is correct, the men involved, the doctors and medical staff involved, those advising the women all risk great damage to their moral character. The concentration here is on the woman for she is most directly involved.

What are the features of the lives of women who have abortions which may be revealing of their moral character? What kinds of reasons do they give for their abortions? The studies referred to above give some indication of how some women view their decision to abort. Interviews with women who have had abortions provide a fairly full picture of the lives of women who have abortion and the quality of their abortion decision. They show that women who have abortions are involved in relationships which are not prepared for the eventuality of a child; they show that many, if not most, of the women who abort were pregnant not by "accident", but by some kind of calculated choice; and they also show that many of the women believe that they are taking a human life when they abort. Let us look at some of the evidence which supports these claims.

### Relationships

Upon reading the testimonies of many women who had abortions, Stanley Hauerwas observed,

...I am impressed that in spite of the hundreds of articles published defending or opposed to abortion, the way people decide to have or not to have an abortion rarely seems to involve the issues discussed in those articles. People contemplating abortion do not ask if the fetus has a right to life, or when does life

begin, or even if abortion is right or wrong. Rather, the decision seems to turn primarily on the quality of the relationship (or lack of relationship) between the couple.

The quality of the relationship which exists between the couple is, as Hauerwas notes, frequently the key to the abortion decision. The one characteristic that is nearly universal among women deciding to have abortions is that they are engaged in relationships which are not conducive to raising a child. Perhaps it is obvious that most of the women who have abortions are unwed, some of the married women are pregnant by men other than their husbands, and many who are married regularly speak of troubled marriages which they fear cannot sustain a child or another child. Those who are unwed have quite clearly been involved in relationships which, although sexual, were not strong enough to accommodate a child conceived by the sexual union. Since the women having abortions have usually been involved in relationships not designed to accommodate all the responsibilities it may engender, perhaps it is fair to say that they display a significant amount of irresponsibility.

Nor do the relationships in which the women are involved seem to offer them much support as they faced their pregnancies. Some women never inform the father of the child of the pregnancy. Those who do tell the male involved do not seem really to involve him and his wishes in the decision-making process, they simply inform him of their decision. That most of the women make their decisions without giving full weight to the view of the male, supports the observation that these were not stable and satisfying relationships--for the sense of mutually sharing one's life and decision seems not to have been present in these relationships.

Moreover, the fact that over half acted without the agreement of the men involved indicates troubled relationships. One researcher, Linda Bird Francke, tells us that in her research almost every relationship between single people broke up either before or after the abortion. Although Francke mentions one study which showed that in marital relationships, the abortion was a positive act, this study was done only six months after the abortion. Most of the statements taken from married women speak of resentment towards the husband. Thus, the relationships of women who have abortions seem characterized by instability, poor communication, and lack of true mutuality. Again, those involved in such relationships seem to be characterized by irresponsibility, and confusion about what they really want--which results in them being quite manifestly dishonest both with themselves and with their partners.

### Contraceptive Practices

This charge of "irresponsibility" finds support in the contraceptive practices of these women (and the men with whom they are involved), for not only do the women engage in acts which have possible consequences for which they are not prepared but they also do not seem to be willing to take the steps necessary to prevent the occurrence of a situation for which they are not prepared to be responsible. Studies show that the women having abortions are not ignorant of birth control methods; the great majority are experienced contraceptors. Nearly all others have full knowledge of contraceptives, but, as Zimmerman observed, they display carelessness and indifference in their use of contraception.

Moreover, the failure to use birth control indicates some other characteristics of the women having abortions. There are, of course, many subtle psychological reasons for failing to use contraceptives. Zimmerman reports on the many different reasons which women give: these include such reasons as a break-up in the relationship which seemed to signal that contraceptives would not be needed, a dislike for the physical exam required for the pill, a dislike of the side-effects, inconvenience or difficulty in getting the pills. Zimmerman observes that many unmarried women do not like to think of themselves as sexually active and that using contraceptives conflicts with their preferred self-image. The failure to use birth control is a sign that many women are not comfortable with being sexually active. That is, many of the women are engaged in an activity which, for some reason, they do not wish to admit to themselves. These women seem not to have much self-knowledge, nor do they seem to be self-determining--they seem to be "letting things happen" which, were they reflective and responsible individuals, they may not accept as actions for themselves.

### "Deliberate" Pregnancies

Kristin Luker in an earlier book Taking Chances: Abortion and the Decision not to Contracept attempted to discover why, with contraceptives so widely available, so many women (virtually all knowledgeable about contraception) had unwanted pregnancies and abortions. The conclusions of Luker's studies suggest that it is not simple "carelessness" or "irresponsibility" which lead women to have abortions, but that frequently the pregnancies which are aborted are planned or the result of a calculated risk. She begins by dismissing some of the commonly held views about why women get abortions; she denies that they are usually had by panic-stricken youngsters or that they are had by unmarried women who would otherwise have had illegitimate births. She also maintains that statistics do not show that abortion is a last ditch effort used by poor women and "welfare mothers" or that abortion is often sought by women who have more children than they can handle. What she attempts to discern is what reason women had for not using contraception although they were contraceptively experienced and knew the risks involved in not using contraception. Luker seeks to substantiate in her study that "unwanted pregnancy is the end result of an informed decision-making process; and more important, that this process is a rational one, in which women use means appropriate to their goals. That pregnancy occurred anyway, for the women in this study, is because most of them were attempting to achieve more diffuse goals than simply preventing pregnancy."

Luker argues that for these women (women who are having non-contraceptive sex, but who are not intending to have babies), using contraceptives has certain "costs" and getting pregnant has certain "benefits". The women make a calculation that the benefits of not using contraception and the benefits of a pregnancy outweigh the risks of getting pregnant and the need to have an abortion. Luker's analysis of the "costs" of using contraception parallels closely that of Zimmerman. For instance, many women prefer "spontaneous sex"; they don't like thinking of themselves as "sexually active". She notes that some wondered whether or not they were fertile and thus did not take contraceptives. The "benefits" of a pregnancy for many women were many; pregnancy "proved that one is a woman", that one is fertile; it provides an excuse for "forcing a definition in the relationship"; it forces her parents to deal with her"; it is used as a "psychological organizing technique."

In a later chapter Luker analyzes more "contextually" the reasons which women have for risk-taking with non-contraceptive sex. Her analysis focuses on pregnancy as a means of forcing marriage in a "depressed marriage market." She insists that she is not suggesting that "because women are at a competitive disadvantage in the marriage market [that] they then go

out and become pregnant in order to get married; few women are that calculating or naive. On the contrary, ...when women are at a competitive disadvantage, contraceptive risk-taking has a socially induced halo of functionality surrounding it, a halo of which women are often only subliminally aware." Ultimately, what she seems to be saying is that women do not calculatingly or naively become pregnant to force marriage, but that "forcing marriage" is one pressure which combines with others to lead a woman to risk pregnancy. It is also pertinent to note that almost all of the unmarried women she interviewed had the option to marry (and supposedly to complete the pregnancy) but that none chose this option. Luker attributes this to their unwillingness to get married under such conditions, to the disparity between this kind of marriage and their fantasy marriage, and to their belief that they, not the male, was responsible for the pregnancy, and thus they had no claim on his support.

As noted, Luker argues that these women are rational in their risk-taking, in their not using contraception although they did not intend a pregnancy. She maintains that though it is not often an explicit or articulated calculation, that the women weighed the costs of using contraception against the costs and benefits of a pregnancy. One of her examples is of an unmarried woman who did not like using the pill because it made her gain weight. Coupled with this was her wish to force her boyfriend to openly admit his relationship with her to his parents who rejected her, and possibly to force marriage and thus she decided not to use contraception. Luker considers this a "rational" decision because the woman had determined certain means to achieve her end. Luker further evaluates these decisions as "rational" because the women assigned low "probabilities" to getting pregnant; they thought pregnancy was unlikely to happen to them. Luker compares this to people who smoke and discount the possibility that they might get cancer. Moreover, she notes that those who "get away" with taking risks tend to continue in that behavior; thus, since women can go a long time without getting pregnant, they tend to think they are "safe." Though the aftermath of these decisions--that fact that all the women she interviewed had abortions--led many of the women to characterize their own previous behavior as irrational (an evaluation shared by those with the doctors, nurses, etc. with whom they came in contact), Luker argues that their decisions were "reasonable" "under the circumstances."

It seems fair to call Luker's evaluation into question. First let it be noted that Luker was not attempting to evaluate the moral character of these women or to assess the morality of their decision to have an abortion. Luker's primary concern was to show that women had reasons for not using contraception, reasons which, evaluated in terms of the risks involved, were justifiable. On the basis of this claim, she undertook to argue that more and better access to contraception would not stem unwanted pregnancies; she advised greater access to abortion. Luker, though, stretches to the point of unrecognizability the word "rational." "Rational" more properly refers to behavior which is reflective, based upon clearly articulated judgments in accord with the facts of a situation, and one well-designed to achieve one's end. Luker, in spite of her intentions, depicts these women as taking risks on the basis of ill-defined and unarticulated reasons and pressures, risks which seemed ill-suited to achieve the desired ends. Luker makes no attempt to discern if the women explored other means to the ends which they desired. She never questions, for instance, if it is an intelligent decision for a young woman to get pregnant and have an abortion for the sake of having her family take notice of her, or for the sake of proving her fertility to herself, or for the sake of learning if her boyfriend cares about her.

Luker does not write with the purpose of explaining why women have abortions but her study is most revealing of the reasons why women have abortions. Her study leads this interpreter to

judge that these women were not adept at determining how to solve the problems which their lives presented them and that they did not realistically evaluate their relationships and their own expectations for these relationships. Despite Luker's claim to the contrary, I believe that Luker's study supports the claim that many if not most of the women who choose abortion are irresponsible, and to some extent irrational.

### Abortion: a choice that violates most women's values

Women may get pregnant for a variety of reasons, but the most common reason for having an abortion is that the women are not prepared for the responsibilities of a child. Again, most are not prepared because they are not married to and not intending to marry the man who impregnated them. It must also be noted that although these women were not prepared to have a child, many reluctantly have abortions. Many state that they felt pressured into having the abortion either because they feared or knew that their parents would reject them, that their boyfriends or husbands would leave them, or because their friends and co-workers thought abortion was the responsible choice for them. This indicates that for many women the decision to abort was only weakly self-determined; they were very much pressured by their situation and their "advisors" to have the abortion. Gilligan, who studied the abortion from the perspective of moral development maintains, that women have been socialized not to make choices for themselves, not to take responsibility for their choices. Again, women may not be responsible for the moral characters which they have, but the evidence seems to suggest that the decision to abort is one which women often wish to attribute not to their own values, but to the pressure which others have put upon them. Insofar as making choices in accord with one's own values is indicative of a good moral character, many women who abort seem devoid of this power--whatever the reason for their lacking this power.

One notable recurrent feature found in the interviews of women who have had abortions is the acknowledgement by the women of their belief that they are taking a human life when they have an abortion. Certainly, some claim that they are not taking a life; for instance, a young woman named Chris felt this way: "...I was talking to the pastor who helped me to get here and he asked me what my conception of life was. And I said, well, I suppose you know just right off the bat the baby is born, you pat it on the back, and it starts breathing. That's life to me. But before then it's nothing. Kind of like a growth." But many others think differently. Consider these statements taken from different sources; seventeen year old Dawn, who decided to have an abortion because she was not emotionally ready to have a baby, admitted, "Well, it's [abortion] killing all the way through, but--um--I'm all mixed up about this. I think it's just killing all the way through." Maria speaks of her second abortion, "This time I hoped the baby was a boy and that I could keep it. My husband and I discussed it and discussed it. We had to convince ourselves to have the abortion. It makes it much harder when you already have a child. You realize it's a wonderful thing to go through a pregnancy and then have a baby dependent on you. This time I couldn't help thinking it was a human being, living being." Sandra asserts "I have always thought abortion was a fancy word for murder." Sandra commented on her abortion: "I am saying that abortion is morally wrong, but the situation is right, and I am going to do it." One interviewer, Zimmerman, found that most women who had abortions, prior to their abortion did not approve of abortion except for specific situations--which did not include the situation in which they found themselves; on the basis of her research she observed, "In summary, the prior abortion attitudes of the women studied here indicate that abortion is considered acceptable only under specific circumstances. The majority of the women would be likely to disapprove an abortion unless the woman had been raped, or unless she had health problems relating to her pregnancy, or unless she were financially

unable to take care of a baby. Interestingly, their own abortions did not always fall within these circumstances... Many of the women claimed that they had approved of abortion but then later qualified that statement by saying, 'But I never thought I would have one myself' or 'It's the lesser of two evils.' None of the women stated their approval without some qualifying remark. The fact that most of these women did not appear to enter into their abortion experience with complete and unqualified approval of abortion is certainly noteworthy." Zimmerman maintained that the women themselves evaluated their own choice as a form of deviance. Their feeling that they were "treading on thin moral ice" led women to be secretive about their abortions so they would not risk being morally challenged about their abortions.

A pattern seems to emerge here. These testimonies suggest that women who are having abortions are not living in accord with some of the most important values they hold. They themselves frequently, if not usually, characterize abortion and indeed their own decision as taking a human life. Although the women do not generally approve of a abortion, they make exceptions for themselves. It seems that the reasons which many women give for their abortion decisions are not reasons which most would find admirable or acceptable, even those who consider abortion morally permissible, even those who are having abortions. If, then, it is a virtue to act in accord with one's principles, many of the women having abortions seem not to have this virtue and are acting in a way which will not advance their possession of it.

### Pro-Life Feminism

The analysis here has been based upon a reading of the testimonies of women who have had abortions, testimony gathered almost exclusively by those who themselves believe abortion to be morally permissible. Most if not all of the interviewers would consider themselves to be feminists. Most believe that through exercising control over their fertility, women who have abortions are acquiring virtues or characteristics once associated only with men. Most of those who subscribe to the values of feminism tend to judge the women who choose abortion to be acquiring some admirable characteristics such as self-assertiveness, rational control over their lives, independence. Still, Sidney Callahan, who considers herself a "pro-life feminist", argues that abortion violates the deeper values of feminism, that is foster characteristics which are desirable neither for men nor women.

Callahan's argument has many parts. She states that feminists are dedicated to fighting for the rights of the oppressed; that they are interested in equality and due process and fairness; she maintains that it is inconsistent for feminists, then, to deny the unborn child the right to life, to use the power of technology to kill the innocent and defenseless. She argues that feminists should not adopt the value of individual autonomy with its emphasis on complete control over one's life; a control and autonomy that rejects the responsibilities that come with an unplanned pregnancy. She maintains that being a part of the human family, being a woman, brings with it certain responsibilities which ought to be accepted whether or not freely chosen, whether or not convenient. But what is most important to the thesis here, is her observation that there is a general chaos in the lives of many, if not most, of the lives of women who have abortions and a real confusion about the place of sexuality in their lives, about the connection between characteristics that are valuable in one's professional life and in one's personal life. She states:

. . . many pro-choice feminists preach their own double standard. In the world of work and career, women are urged to grow up, to display mature self-discipline and self-control; they are told to persevere in long-term commitments, to cope with unexpected obstacles by learning to tough out the inevitable sufferings and

setbacks entailed in life and work. But this mature ethics of commitment and self-discipline, recommended as the only way to progress in the world of work and personal achievement, is discounted in the domain of sexuality. . . . Responsibly choosing an abortion supposedly ensures that a young woman will take charge of her own life, make her own decisions, and carefully practice contraception. But the social dynamics of a permissive erotic model of sexuality, coupled with permissive laws, work toward repeat abortions. Instead of being empowered by their abortion choices, young women having abortions are confronting the debilitating reality of not bringing a baby into the world; not being able to count on a committed male partner; not accounting oneself strong enough, or the master of enough resources, to avoid killing the fetus. Young women are hardly going to develop the self-esteem, self-discipline, and self-confidence necessary to confront a male-dominated society through abortion.

In terms used here, these women do not exhibit much virtue, much moral strength, nor does their choice to abort appear to be an act that will further their virtue or moral strength. A list of moral characteristics was tentatively offered earlier in this paper to provide a base upon which an analysis of action in terms of virtue could proceed. The claim was made that we all would want to have these characteristics and we would want those we associate with to have them, too. The list included kindness, generosity, self-reliance, loyalty, commitment, responsibility, reliability, supportiveness, self-determination, sincerity, honesty, good-naturedness, trustworthiness, and self-discipline. The interviews of women who choose to have abortions indicate that they could not be described in these terms.

#### Aftermath of Abortion

Finally let us note, that though there is not a great deal of documentation on how women fare after their abortion, what little evidence there is suggests that it is not an overwhelmingly positive experience. Indeed, yearly nearly one third of abortions are repeat abortions. It would seem that many of these women, at least, return much to the same life which they were leading prior to their abortions. By their own testimony many of the women who were not promiscuous before the abortion become so afterwards; most have difficulty sustaining long term relationships with a male. Most women maintain that relief is the immediate outcome of an abortion though most speak of some depression and confusion afterwards. The conclusions of the psychological studies of those who have had abortions are remarkably mixed. Before the legalization of abortion several studies showed that abortion was traumatic for women. After the legalization of abortion, most studies show that few women suffer little long-term psychological consequences. The validity of these studies has been called into question in terms of the scientific reliability. Certainly the conclusions may also be affected by a bias produced by an ideological commitment to abortion rights.

It is well documented that some women come to regret their abortions and suffer severe trauma after the abortion. They regularly speak of feeling that they were pressured into the abortion. They speak of their confusion at the time of the abortion, their troubled relationships with family and boyfriend; they tell of their suicidal desires, their alienation and loneliness after the abortion. Several groups have been formed to assist women who have come to regret their abortions; Women Exploited by Abortion and Victims of Abortion are both such groups. One author describing women who have had abortions tells that even those who have come to terms with their regret "...will tell you that their decision-making skills are damaged, that self-doubt has become the common denominator of their personalities. After all, they made one

terrible mistake. When will they stumble into the next?" Women who regret their abortions believe that there are millions of women "out there" who are "broken" and agonizing inside about their abortions, that they are in a state of deep denial about their feelings about their abortions.

Why would information about the psychological aftermath of abortion assist us in determining the moral character of women after the abortion? Certainly, some psychological weaknesses or strengths are closely connected with moral character. High self-esteem may assist one in having the confidence and presence of mind to take into account all factors in a situation and to make a good decision. It may enable one to resist undue pressure from others and it may keep one free from debilitating fears which could lead one to act out of cowardice. Indeed, high self-esteem may be connected with how one assesses one's own moral character; those who believe themselves to be morally good may have greater self-esteem. Depression could lead one to be unable to meet one's commitments and obligations and lead to moral failure as a reliable and dependable person. But until the studies done on the psychological aftermath of abortion are standardized and attain a higher degree of reliability, most judgments will continue to be made on the basis of more randomly acquired testimony. This testimony, I submit, suggests that many women exhibit characteristics after their abortion experience which make it difficult for them to advance in moral strength.

An ethics of virtue assesses actions by the type of character which produces and chooses these actions. Abortions, in the eyes of this interpreter, does not fare well as a moral action, according to this analysis. Those seeking to assess the morality of abortion, those seeking to find some other ground for discussion and understanding about the morality of abortion would do well to ponder what kind of moral judgment goes into choosing an abortion, what kind of moral character results from an abortion.

#### NOTES