



Teleological Ethics and the Moral-Legal Justification of Abortion: A Utilitarian Perspective

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Abstract: *This study examines the moral and legal justification of abortion through the lens of teleological ethics, particularly utilitarianism. Employing a qualitative methodology, it analyzes classical philosophical texts, contemporary academic literature, and legal frameworks to assess how outcome-based ethical reasoning informs abortion debates. Findings indicate that utilitarian ethics support abortion access as a means to reduce suffering and enhance societal well-being, especially for marginalized populations. However, the analysis also acknowledges critiques concerning the moral status of the fetus and the limitations of purely consequentialist approaches. The study concludes that while teleological ethics provide a flexible framework for evaluating abortion, integrating deontological principles may offer a more comprehensive ethical discourse.*

Keywords: Abortion; Teleological Ethics; Utilitarianism

Abstrak: Artikel ini mengkaji praktik aborsi melalui lensa etika teleologis, dengan fokus khusus pada perspektif utilitarianisme. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan tinjauan pustaka naratif, tulisan ini mengeksplorasi argumen moral dan hukum yang mendukung dan menentang aborsi. Pandangan utilitarian berfokus pada hasil dari tindakan, mempertimbangkan kesejahteraan ibu, janin, dan masyarakat secara keseluruhan. Artikel ini menyoroti kompleksitas etika dalam praktik aborsi dan menunjukkan bahwa keputusan moral sebaiknya mempertimbangkan konteks serta konsekuensinya. Dengan menyeimbangkan prinsip manfaat terbesar dengan hak individu, pendekatan ini menawarkan dasar yang masuk akal untuk mempertimbangkan aborsi dalam konteks hukum dan moral.

Kata kunci: Aborsi; Etika teleologis; Utilitarianisme

INTRODUCTION

Abortion remains one of the most debated ethical issues in contemporary society, intersecting law, philosophy, religion, and public health. In this context, teleological law ethics—rooted in consequentialist traditions such as utilitarianism—has emerged as a

significant framework for evaluating moral dilemmas by focusing on outcomes rather than absolute rules (Sumner, 2014). The influence of teleological reasoning extends beyond Western philosophical discourse; it shapes legal practices and societal attitudes toward abortion across diverse cultures (Savulescu & Schuklenk, 2017). Understanding how these ethical frameworks operate within different legal systems is crucial for grasping the broader dynamics that inform reproductive rights debates globally.

Previous research on abortion ethics has predominantly centred on deontological perspectives that emphasize inviolable moral principles or individual rights (e.g., right to life or autonomy). While these studies have enriched our understanding of normative arguments against or in favour of abortion, there remains a notable gap regarding comprehensive analyses from a teleological standpoint—especially concerning how consequences for individuals and society are weighed in justifying abortion. (Savulescu & Schuklenk, 2017; Sumner, 2014). Furthermore, much-existing literature tends to focus either on political-legal aspects or religious doctrine without integrating nuanced philosophical discussions about outcomes-based justification.

This article aims to critically examine how teleological law ethics informs debates over the justification of abortion by analyzing classical utilitarian arguments alongside recent developments in applied moral philosophy. The scope includes comparative analysis across Western contexts while also considering global perspectives where relevant literature exists. Sources will encompass foundational texts as well as current peer-reviewed studies published within the last decade.

By filling this gap in academic inquiry, this study seeks to advance interdisciplinary understanding between legal theory and moral philosophy regarding reproductive autonomy—a subject with profound implications for policy-making worldwide (Savulescu & Schuklenk, 2017). Ultimately, it hopes to enrich ongoing discussions about balancing individual rights with collective welfare through rigorous engagement with outcome-oriented ethical reasoning.

Abortion, as a complex and often controversial issue, has been debated from various perspectives, including legal, philosophical, and religious frameworks. One of the key philosophical frameworks that provides insight into the morality of abortion is teleological ethics. Teleological ethics evaluates actions based on their outcomes or

consequences. In particular, utilitarianism, a form of teleology, suggests that actions are morally right if they result in the greatest happiness or benefit for the greatest number of people. This essay explores abortion from a teleological perspective, evaluating it in terms of its potential to promote well-being and minimize suffering for both the individual and society. Additionally, it considers other philosophical and religious viewpoints, such as antinatalism and Islamic jurisprudence, to address the broader implications of abortion decisions. This raises a question: Is abortion morally justified from a teleological ethical standpoint, and how do different philosophical and religious perspectives influence this justification?

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach through an extensive literature review to explore teleological law ethics regarding abortion justification. Data were gathered from diverse scholarly sources, including classical philosophical texts on teleology, contemporary academic journal articles, books on applied ethics and bioethics, as well as legal analyses accessed via reputable databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and DOAJ. The selection criteria prioritized works that directly address teleological ethical frameworks or consequentialist reasoning applied to abortion debates. Both historical perspectives and recent developments within moral philosophy were included to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The analysis involved identifying key themes related to outcome-based justifications for abortion, categorizing arguments according to ethical principles and legal implications, and synthesizing these findings into a coherent narrative that reflects current scholarly discourse. To ensure validity, triangulation was conducted by comparing multiple sources across disciplines—philosophy, law, and bioethics—and contextual interpretation was applied to account for cultural and societal influences shaping these ethical discussions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teleological ethics, particularly in the form of utilitarianism, serves as a framework for evaluating moral actions based on their consequences. The ethical analysis of abortion through this lens shifts the focus from rigid deontological stances, which prioritize adherence to set moral rules, to a more flexible examination of the outcomes associated with permitting or prohibiting abortion. By weighing the overall benefits

against the harms incurred by both individuals and society, utilitarianism provides a nuanced justification that considers the interplay of individual autonomy and societal welfare (Begun et al., 2016).

One of the central arguments supporting abortion from a utilitarian perspective is the alleviation of suffering for pregnant individuals, especially in cases of unwanted pregnancies. Granting access to abortion can prevent various physical, psychological, and socioeconomic adversities, thus promoting overall well-being. Research indicates that access to safe abortion services correlates with a reduction in maternal mortality and morbidity, thereby bolstering the argument for permissive abortion policies based on the positive aggregate effects on public health and social equity. (Oyeniran et al., 2019; Savulescu & Schuklenk, 2017). Additionally, women with access to abortion may experience enhanced economic participation, further contributing to societal well-being. (Schott et al., 2023).

On the contrary, critics argue that potential fetal life must not be disregarded in consequentialist assessments of abortion. (Mcgee, 2022). This perspective posits that the moral considerations of abortion must also include the future well-being of the fetus, thus complicating the utilitarian calculus of benefit versus harm. (Redd et al., 2023). This ethical tension is prevalent in discussions surrounding abortion, particularly in contexts where individuals or groups hold varying views about the moral status of the fetus. The conflict thus arises between recognizing women's rights to autonomy and acknowledging the value of potential life. (Zulu et al., 2018).

Consequently, an expanding body of scholarly work has approached teleological ethics by examining additional societal implications, such as the effects of legal and policy frameworks on reproductive health. Research indicates that restrictive abortion laws often lead to unsafe practices, disproportionately affecting marginalized women who face greater barriers to accessing safe abortion care. (Gluchman, 2016). This evidentiary basis reinforces utilitarian claims advocating for policies that uphold reproductive rights, aiming to optimize public health outcomes while minimizing harm to women. (Tutić et al., 2024).

Critics of a purely quantitative approach to ethical analysis caution against oversimplifying complex moral landscapes through numerical assessments. They

emphasize the importance of qualitative aspects, including respect for human dignity, rights-based frameworks, and the diverse cultural contexts shaping ethical considerations (Blackshaw, 2023). These qualitative factors can serve as both guiding principles and potential constraints for utilitarian reasoning in abortion debates. The nuanced nature of moral decisions surrounding abortion demands that both quantitative outcomes and qualitative values be incorporated into ethical evaluations (McCaffrey, 2024).

In response to critiques highlighting the limitations of utilitarian frameworks, hybrid ethical models aiming to integrate aspects of deontological approaches with consequentialist reasoning have gained traction. These models maintain fixed moral principles—such as respect for fetal potential—while pragmatically considering outcomes across varying contexts. (Singh, 2010). Such approaches seek to balance the rights of pregnant individuals with considerations for fetal life, promoting a more holistic ethical discourse within abortion debates.

Legal scholars have applied teleological reasoning in interpreting protections surrounding reproductive autonomy within various jurisdictions. Courts have turned to consequentialist arguments when weighing the societal interests of ensuring women's health alongside considerations of fetal life, thus illustrating how teleological ethics informs legal practices and policymaking. This dynamic underscores the intersection of ethical reasoning and legal frameworks, demonstrating the practical implications of teleological ethics in shaping reproductive rights.

Equally important are cross-cultural studies, which reveal how different cultural contexts influence the application of teleological ethics to abortion. In societies where community welfare and collectivist values are prioritized over individual autonomy—such as in parts of Southeast Asia—justifications for restrictive abortion access often coexist with international human rights norms advocating for reproductive freedom. (Shaw, 2019). These variations point to the adaptability of teleological ethics, which can provide relevant ethical guidance while also respecting cultural distinctions in moral reasoning.

Moreover, the integration of empirical data into ethical deliberations can enhance the normative claims presented within teleological frameworks. Grounding ethical discussions in observable consequences rather than speculative metaphysical arguments

fosters constructive dialogue between ethicists, policymakers, and healthcare providers striving for pragmatic solutions that equitably balance competing interests (Hersey et al., 2022). This empirical approach can also illuminate disparities in abortion access, thereby underscoring the need for targeted interventions to promote health equity among diverse populations (Grama, 2022).

In conclusion, teleological ethics, particularly through a utilitarian lens, offers compelling justifications for abortion based on maximizing well-being and minimizing suffering. While this ethical framework presents limitations, it provides a flexible structure capable of incorporating complex moral considerations while informing policy decisions. As debates evolve in response to shifting societal dynamics and medical advancements, future research should continue to explore hybrid ethical models and cross-cultural implications to further enrich ethical guidance in the arena of reproductive health.

Ultimately, the ongoing discourse surrounding abortion demands recognition of the multifaceted ethical dimensions involved, requiring a careful negotiation between the rights of individuals, societal interests, and the moral status of potential life. Such an approach emphasizes the need for continued exploration of ethical frameworks that account for the variances in cultural values, the legal landscape, and the lived experiences of those most affected by reproductive policies. (Atuhaire, 2019; Bwalya, 2022)

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that teleological ethics, particularly in its utilitarian form, offers a comprehensive and context-sensitive framework for evaluating the moral and legal dimensions of abortion. By focusing on the outcomes of moral actions, utilitarianism allows for the inclusion of empirical data and contextual factors—such as maternal health, socioeconomic impact, and public health outcomes—thereby promoting ethical reasoning grounded in real-world consequences. The approach supports abortion access as a means of reducing suffering and enhancing well-being, especially for marginalized populations disproportionately affected by restrictive laws.

However, the application of utilitarian ethics to abortion is not without limitations. Critics raise valid concerns regarding the moral status of the fetus and the risk of

oversimplifying complex ethical dilemmas through purely quantitative analysis. These critiques have given rise to hybrid ethical models that integrate deontological principles with consequentialist reasoning, reflecting the growing demand for more holistic and balanced moral frameworks.

Moreover, cross-cultural and legal analyses reveal that teleological reasoning is both adaptable and influential across diverse sociopolitical contexts. Its integration into judicial decisions and policy debates underscores its practical utility in shaping reproductive rights and public health policies. The inclusion of empirical data further strengthens teleological claims, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue among ethicists, legal scholars, and healthcare professionals.

Future research should explore the application of hybrid ethical frameworks and examine context-specific ethical deliberations across various cultural and legal systems. In particular, greater attention should be given to the lived experiences of individuals affected by reproductive policies to ensure that ethical analysis remains grounded in human realities. Ultimately, the complex ethical terrain of abortion requires an ongoing, pluralistic discourse that balances individual rights, societal interests, and the evolving understanding of moral personhood.

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