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## Is Birth Control Ethically Justifiable?

Birth control, also known as contraception, is 'is any method, medicine, or device used to prevent pregnancy.' (WomensHealth. 2015) As there are conflicting views regarding our moral obligation to allow birth control it is related to ethics. As ethics falls under one of the six main branches of philosophy, the questioning of the ethical justifiability of the use of birth control can be labelled a philosophical issue.

In order to draw a conclusion as to whether or not the use of contraceptive methods is ethically justifiable, multiple views need to be discussed and considered, including positions such as Christian ethics, Consequentialism and Kantian ethics. In order to come to the conclusion that birth control can be considered as ethically justifiable, the arguments must prove to overthrow any opposing views.

In the discussion of each of these positions, arguments will be explored to discuss the strength each. An argument is a connected series of statements used to establish a definite conclusion. It is important that all information is accurate and justifiable, to develop a valid and sound argument. Using a range of argumentative devices, the strength of each argument will be analysed to lead to an educated and justifiable conclusion as to whether or not birth control can be considered as ethically justifiable.

Within Catholic teachings, natural law arguments are commonly used to condemn unnatural, and therefore immoral acts, such as birth control. It follows that, 'The Bible is the inspired, error-free, and revealed word of God.' (J. Kohlhaas, 2018), thus, as birth control conflicts with the path of conception, it goes against the natural order God and is not ethically justifiable. The natural order was appropriated through the premise that as God was our creator, we must respect his will, and not go against the natural order. Christianity claims that any birth control is 'unnatural', as it is a distortion of our nature and does not align with the will of God. Therefore, an argument following Christian views and the natural order would align with the following;

P1: it is wrong to interfere with the natural order of the universe

P2: Birth control interferes with the natural order of the universe

C: Therefore, birth control is wrong

This argument follows a deductive format, with the premises working together to prove the conclusion (P, Q, -Q therefore -P) in the valid form of a Modus Tollens. The empirical nature of the arguments alludes the possibility of the arguments being proven true, although as the premises are based on religious view that have not yet been proven, the conclusion cannot be solidified. Thus, the Christian view is strong, as when the premises are presumed to be true, the conclusion must be too although it is not cogent as there is no proof that it is wrong to interfere with the natural order of the universe.

The Catholic Church implements teachings that any form of abortion (including preventatives such as birth control) go against the basic principle that 'human life must be respected and

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protected absolutely from the moment of conception' (Kohlhaas, J 2018) and opposes anything with the purpose to destroy or prevent the birth of a baby. The belief of the Catholic Church follows the previous argument surrounding the natural law, and ultimately agree that birth control cannot be ethically justified. From this, the Church has upheld the position that every measure taken in the hopes to prevent a pregnancy is a moral evil, a belief that the catholic church declares 'has not changed and remains unchangeable' (Kohlhaas, J 2018). Thus the Christian Church agrees that under Christian ethics, birth control would be proven ethically unjustifiable.

Utilitarians follow a moral system, the Greatest Happiness Principle, that each person should aim to 'maximise happiness and minimise pain for both the individual and sum of individuals in a community' (Jones, G, Cardinal, D & Hayward, J 2006), in all decisions. Under the belief of John S. Mill, 'the pains and pleasures of each individual are to be take equally; no one should hold higher importance, although happiness can be measures to different extents' (Jones, G, Cardinal, D & Hayward, J 2006). Someone, such as Mill, who holds a Utilitarian view, would say that in order to bring about the most happiness, birth control is necessary. Its exclusion would inherently lead to an increase in population, resulting in a decrease in available recourses and ultimately an escalation of poverty rates. Additionally, some forms of birth control can be used to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections and diseases, alleviating further possible sources of pain. Therefore, the use of birth control would ultimately maximise happiness for the larger majority in the future. Under the Utilitarian view, in order to establish greatest happiness, pain must be absent, and if birth control can fight pain, then its usage can be ethically justified.

P1: Pain must be alleviated when establishing the greatest happiness

P2: Birth control can alleviate pain

C: Birth control works to establish the greatest happiness

The strong deductive argument surrounding Utilitarianism proves that using birth control is ethically justifiable as it works to eliminate pain, thus increasing happiness in the wider population. Each premise is sound and can be proven true, in order to prove the conclusion in the valid form of modus ponens, proving its cogency.

John S Mill believes that 'experience is the only true foundation of knowledge' (Cambridge University Press 2015), and thus philosophy 'allows no place for traditional or received ideas of right and wrong' (Schenker, J 201). Without his beliefs against religion, Mill focuses on the ethical rights and wrongs of using contraception and ultimately works to agree with the conclusion that happiness is pleasure in the absence of pain. As contraception works to allow those to experience pleasure, however minimal the extent may be, whilst increasing protection against any possible pain, Mill ultimately believes that birth control is ethically justifiable, following the Utilitarian view.

The categorical imperative says that 'an object, rationally necessary and unconditional principle that we must always follow despite any natural desires or inclinations we may have to the contrary.' (Johnson, R & Cureton, A 2019). It acts on all people, regardless on their interests or beliefs. Similarly, Immanuel Kant's principle of universalizability maintains that, 'Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' (Johnson, R & Cureton, A 2019) and that we should act in a way that we expect

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others to. Following this principle, if your maxim followed Agape, that you were to only act in a way that brings about the most love, a valid argument would follow the pattern of;

P3: Making an educated decision surrounding when children can be effectively cared for is more loving.

P4: Using birth control allows parents to make an educated decision surrounding when children can be effectively cared for.

C: Using birth control brings the most love.

This argument is strong as it follows the valid form of modus ponens. It is made up of empirical statements that can be inferred true to form a sound and true conclusion. Due to this, it is cogent and proves the belief of those following Agape.

As it is more loving to the wider majority to limit the number of children, thus increase the resources and providing for the children, birth control can be ethically justified. Continuing, a lack of birth control can lead to the spread of health issues and unwanted pregnancies. Agape 'demands love for those unwanted babies, and for the children born with health conditions' (The University of Chicago Press Journal 2019) and contraception is a small price to pay when put into a comparison with the amount of recourses needed to care for children's needs.

Immanuel Kant had the belief that, 'it is not requisite for human beings who marry to make their end' (Sandel, M 2010) and 'enjoyment in the reciprocal use of the sexual endowments is an end of marriage' (Sandel, M 2010). As a resultant, following the maxim of Agape, it would be possible to universalise principals of family planning, allowing couples to make an educated decision as to when they would be able to provide for children, ultimately making the most loving choice protecting the wider majority.

Thus, when following the position of Kantian Ethics following the maxim of Agape, it is ethically justifiable to use birth control as it is proven to be the most loving option.

Ultimately, I believe that if birth control 'results in every child being a wanted child, and in better, healthier lives for women,' (Johnson, R & Cureton, A 2019), along with reducing extreme poverty, it must be ethically justifiable. It brings the most happiness and the least pain, following the utilitarian view, and is the most loving option following Kantian ethics.

The catholic view is based solely on religious premises. As there is no evidentiary support to back up these premises, the accuracy of the conclusion cannot be deduced and the argument only holds sound to those with catholic beliefs. Additionally, human beings inherently interfere with the natural order of the universe commonly, such as when doctors treat a patient with an illness, in order to satisfy the happiness of the most amount of people, as the most loving action. Thus, the view of the catholic church is flawed and the argument cannot stand true in the case that the natural order is being broken to increase happiness currently. Consequently, if humans are not allowed a choice as to whether to have children, their freedom and control over both their bodies and lives are fundamentally restricted.

There is no way to eliminate all interferences with the natural order, thus we must focus on the nature of the interference and the benefits it may bring. Since humanity interferes with the

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natural order of the universe all the time, what matters is whether the consequences of that interference are good or bad.

Therefore, due to the points raised, I believe that birth control is ethically justifiable. The catholic position is inherently flawed and limited to a small number of people, and the natural order is currently being broken in the hopes to bring about more happiness. On the other hand, both the Utilitarian and Kantian Ethic positions agree that as birth control brings the most happiness and the least pain, and is the most loving option, it must be ethically justifiable.

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