

My Future Parental Responsibility, My Choice

Alex Naileg 
PhD, independent scholar,
alex.naileg@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54310/Elpis.2024.2.11>

1. Introduction

Widely held assumptions about equality of rights and responsibilities, abortion rights, and genuine parental responsibility lead to a logical contradiction. For brevity, in this essay, a person who is capable of becoming pregnant but who is not capable of impregnating someone who is capable of becoming pregnant is referred to as a *biowoman*, and a person who is not capable of becoming pregnant but who is capable of impregnating someone who is capable of becoming pregnant is referred to as a *bioman*.¹ Using this terminology, the contradiction arises as follows. Given equality of rights and responsibilities, biowomen have parental responsibility for their born child if and only if biomen have parental responsibility for their born child. Since it is not the case that only someone other than the biological mother and the father has parental responsibility for a born child, but someone must have, it follows that both biowomen and biomen have parental responsibility for their born child. Since biowomen have parental responsibility for their born child, which can be relinquished by terminating their own pregnancy, and since biowomen have the right to abortion, it follows that biowomen also have the right to relinquish their future parental responsibility. However, since biomen have parental responsibility for their born child, but biomen do not have a right to terminate a pregnancy with their child (since biomen having such a right would contradict biowomen having the right not to be forced to have an abortion), and a right to terminate a pregnancy with their child would be needed for biomen to be able to relinquish their future parental responsibility, it follows that biomen do not have the right to relinquish their future parental responsibility. However, given equality of rights and responsibilities, biowomen having the right to relinquish their future parental responsibility is in contradiction with biomen not having the right to relinquish their future parental responsibility.

While this argument is not new in the sense that the tension expressed by it is echoed in many personal experiences, it has not, to my knowledge, been presented

¹ I do not assume that every person falls under one of these two descriptions.

as a strict logical contradiction between widely and often jointly held assumptions in public discourse and philosophical literature. Making the structure of the argument explicit is important: since the argument leads to a logical contradiction, at least one of its premises must be rejected. The contradiction should receive wider attention in the philosophy community because it significantly impacts attempts to justify abortion rights beyond their bodily autonomy-based justification, including an argument made by Réz in *Elpis*.² In this paper, I make the main and the inferential premises and the argument explicit and discuss the possible ways in which the arising contradiction can be resolved, with a deliberately narrow focus on the logical connections between different assumptions.

2. Making the premises explicit

The first main premise (P1) is that persons have *equal rights and responsibilities*. Specifically, biomen and biowomen have the same rights and responsibilities.

The second main premise (P2) is that there are *abortion rights*, which I take to be a conjunction of the *right to abortion* – the claim that biowomen have the right to terminate their own pregnancy –, and the *right not to be forced to have an abortion* – the claim that biowomen have the right not to be forced to terminate their own pregnancy against their will.

The third main premise (P3) is that *genuine parental responsibility* exists, which I define as the claim that either biowomen have parental responsibility for their born child, or biomen have parental responsibility for their born child, or both of them do. Premise (P3) can be understood as a conjunction of two assumptions. The first assumption is the *impermissibility of allowing born children to die*: if a child is born, then someone must have parental responsibility for the child. The second assumption is the *de jure* fact that it is *not the case that only someone other than the biological mother or the father has parental responsibility for a born child*. A societal arrangement where *only* someone other than the biological mother or the father had parental responsibility for their child would render the concept of “parental responsibility” an oxymoron, as in such an arrangement the biological parents would not have any parental responsibility. Hence the chosen terminology: *genuine* parental responsibility.

To prove that equality of rights and responsibilities, abortion rights, and genuine parental responsibility cannot coexist we need two more premises which are inferential in that they express the consequences of relationships between rights and responsibilities, given the biological realities.

² Réz 2021.

The first inferential premise (I1) is an instance of an *inference between rights*. The right to abortion is important not only because it allows biowomen to relinquish the bodily burdens of pregnancy, but also because it allows them to relinquish their future burdens of parenthood that would arise after childbirth. If biowomen have parental responsibility for their born child, which can be relinquished by terminating their pregnancy with their child, then if biowomen have the right to abortion, then biowomen also have the right to relinquish their future parental responsibility. However, if biomen have parental responsibility for their born child, which they cannot relinquish when their child is born, and if they cannot force their pregnant partner to terminate her pregnancy, then biomen cannot relinquish their future parental responsibility that would arise from their child's birth, and hence biomen do not have the right to relinquish their future parental responsibility.

However, if biowomen have the right not to be forced to terminate their own pregnancy, then biomen cannot have the right to terminate a pregnancy with their child, which is our second inferential premise (I2).

The five premises of the argument can be formalized in propositional logic as follows:

- (P1) $EQ \wedge (EQ \rightarrow (WRRPR \leftrightarrow MRRPR)) \wedge (EQ \rightarrow (WPR \leftrightarrow MPR))$
 (P2) $WRAB \wedge WRNOFORCE$
 (P3) $(WPR \vee MPR \vee SPR) \wedge \neg (SPR \wedge \neg WPR \wedge \neg MPR)$
 (I1) $(WPR \rightarrow (WRAB \rightarrow WRRPR)) \wedge (MPR \rightarrow (\neg MRTPC \rightarrow \neg MRRPR))$
 (I2) $WRNOFORCE \rightarrow \neg MRTPC$

Where the abbreviations resolve as:

- EQ: persons have the same rights and responsibilities;
 WRRPR: biowomen have the right to relinquish their future parental responsibility;
 MRRPR: biomen have the right to relinquish their future parental responsibility;
 WPR: biowomen have parental responsibility for their born biological child;
 MPR: biomen have parental responsibility for their born biological child;
 WRAB: biowomen have the right to terminate their own pregnancy;
 WRNOFORCE: biowomen have the right not to be forced to terminate their own pregnancy against their will;
 SPR: someone else (e.g., the state) has parental responsibility for a born child;
 MRTPC: biomen have a right to terminate a pregnancy with their child.

As outlined in the Introduction, and can be verified using a logic calculator, these five premises lead to a logical contradiction.

3. Escaping the contradiction

Since the five premises lead to a contradiction, at least one of the premises must be rejected. I now explore the consequences of rejecting each of the five premises. In each subsection, I assume that the other, non-rejected premises are still considered true. I will regularly invoke the following basic inferences of logic: if five premises lead to a contradiction, then any four of the premises entail the negation of the fifth premise, and any three of the premises entail the conditional statement that a fourth premise entails the negation of the fifth premise.

3.1 Rejecting (P1)

Given the inferential premises, abortion rights and genuine parental responsibility entail that persons, in particular biomen and biowomen, do not have the same rights. Thus, to avoid the contradiction, one might be inclined to reject the premise of equality of rights and responsibilities, and accept that biological differences, in some circumstances, imply different rights and/or responsibilities.

Rejecting equality of rights and responsibilities is, however, a dangerous path with unintended consequences. First, one could ask: are cases discussed in this paper the only examples in which rights of persons differ (in which case we would need to conclude that biowomen have *more* rights than biomen), or are there other biological differences that could also imply differences in rights and/or responsibilities for persons with different biological makeups? If so, what kind of biological differences could imply differences in rights and/or responsibilities? For instance, would biomen, being biologically less essential for rapid population replenishment than biowomen, have an increased responsibility to risk their lives at the front lines when the population is defended from an alien invasion force? Or could having average testosterone levels surpassing a certain threshold be such a biological difference, justifying preferential treatment for occupying testosterone-dependent high-risk jobs, such as becoming a politician or a CEO?

Second, rejecting equality of rights and responsibilities could undermine the struggle to eliminate certain presently existing inequalities in the burdens of parenthood. The inference that *both* biowomen and biomen have parental responsibility for their born child depended on the premise of equality of rights and responsibilities; rejecting equality of rights and responsibilities may lead one to argue that *only* biowomen (or only biomen) have parental responsibility for their born child. As an illustration, consider the following principle some may find plausible:

(P*) It is more permissible to not fulfill (or to fulfill to a lesser extent) responsibility R if a person did not have free choice in assuming responsibility R but was forced to assume

responsibility R than if the person did have a free choice in assuming responsibility R and accepted responsibility R.

Given the assumed premises, pregnant biowomen have a free choice in accepting parental responsibility, but biomen do not have such a choice: whether a bioman ends up with parental responsibility depends entirely on the decision of his pregnant partner. Thus, according to (P*), it would be more permissible for biomen to not fulfill (or to fulfill to a lesser extent) their parental responsibility for their born children than for biowomen. Hence, given the inferential premises, genuine parental responsibility, and the right of biowomen not to be forced to have an abortion, (P*) entails the conditional that the right to abortion implies *inequality* in burdens of parenthood. Thus, under these assumptions, instead of justifying the right to abortion based on existing inequalities in the burdens of parenthood, as some philosophers argue,³ we would reach an opposite conclusion: the right to abortion could justify certain inequalities in the burdens of parenthood.

3.2 Rejecting (P2)

Given the inferential premises, equality of rights and responsibilities and genuine parental responsibility entail that either the right to abortion or the right not to be forced to have an abortion does not exist.

Rejecting the right of biowomen not to be forced to have an abortion against their will would appear as a particularly problematic way of resolving the contradiction. Allowing biowomen to be forced to have an abortion against their will would violate their right to bodily autonomy, and impose significant health burdens on biowomen, not to mention potential issues regarding the putative rights of the fetus that are not addressed in this paper.

The right to abortion is widely discussed in the literature, and I do not reiterate here either the multitude of arguments in its favor or the multitude of negative consequences following its rejection.⁴ I limit myself to exploring the logical relationship between certain justification attempts of the right to abortion and our main argument.

The logical tension of equality of rights and responsibilities, abortion rights, and genuine parental responsibility poses a serious difficulty to certain attempts to justify the right to abortion which are alternative to the bodily autonomy-based justification. One perceived shortcoming of the bodily autonomy-based justification is that it focuses exclusively on the burdens of carrying a pregnancy to term and ignores

³ See Réz 2021, and below.

⁴ See Réz 2021 and its references.

both the existing burdens of parenthood and the existing inequality plaguing these burdens. Indeed, several philosophers argue that the burdens of parenthood and the inequality plaguing these burdens could be relied upon to provide justification for the right to abortion.⁵ The fact that these arguments assume equality of rights and responsibilities and the existence of genuine parental responsibility as premises, and attempt to justify, on their basis, the right to abortion, makes it clear that their authors believe that equality of rights and responsibilities, genuine parental responsibility, and the right to abortion express statements that are jointly consistent (with the authors' further implicit beliefs, which include, presumably, a belief in the right of biowomen to not be forced to have an abortion against their will). The main argument of this paper shows that this is not so; indeed, given the inferential premises and the right of biowomen to not be forced to have an abortion, equality of rights and responsibilities and genuine parental responsibility entail that the right to abortion does not exist, and thus any argument that accepts these premises and attempts to reach the opposite conclusion is either logically invalid or based on logically contradicting premises. The affected philosophical literature is substantial.⁶

3.3 Rejecting (P3)

Given the inferential premises and equality of rights and responsibilities, abortion rights imply that biomen and biowomen do not have parental responsibility for their born child. "My future parental responsibility, my choice" follows from "my body, my choice".

The rejection of genuine parental responsibility, pursued methodically, would seem to have radical societal consequences. Biological parents would need to become free to renounce their parental responsibility, which includes raising or contributing to raising their own children; in particular, current mandatory child support schemes, which place a significant financial burden on biological fathers who decided to leave their pregnant partners, would need to be abolished.

Young children cannot take care of themselves, and hence someone must have parental responsibility for them; denying that someone must have parental responsibility for a born child would imply that allowing born children to be uncared for (until the age they can start taking care of themselves, which is well beyond the age at which they acquire a cognitive capacity sufficient to be treated as persons even under the most demanding view on personhood) and consequently die is permissible. I am not aware of anyone defending such a view. Thus, here I will only consider the case where someone rejects genuine parental responsibility but still accepts the impermissibility of allowing born children to die. Due

⁵ See Réz 2021, 47–55 for an overview.

⁶ Jaggar 1973, 1997; Markowitz 1990; Réz 2021 are notable examples.

to equality of rights and responsibilities, this implies accepting the claim that *only* someone else has parental responsibility for a born child, and persons as biological fathers or mothers do not have parental responsibility. This someone else may be a natural person (potentially even the same person as the biological father or the mother, but due to a reason different from them being biological parents of the child – see below) or some state-like entity.

Could parental responsibility reside with natural persons due to their special relationship with the pregnancy or with the child, other than the relationship of being biological parents? In other words, what type of relationship with the pregnancy or with the child can plausibly give rise to parental responsibility?

Note the right to abortion is the right of biowomen to terminate *their own pregnancy*, and not the right of biowomen to terminate *a pregnancy with their child*. If the latter right existed, a contradiction with equality of rights and responsibilities would arise even without invoking genuine parental responsibility: biomen also having a right to terminate a pregnancy with their child would directly contradict the right of biowomen not to be forced to have an abortion. Since the right to abortion is linked to the bodily aspect of pregnancy, and not to the parental lineage of the child, it is natural to ask whether linking parental responsibility to the bodily aspect of pregnancy, and not to the parental lineage, would also lead to a logical contradiction.

Thus, for the sake of argument, let us now assume that biowomen have parental responsibility for a born child due to being persons who were pregnant with the child. The first part of the inferential premise (I1) would stand as before: the right to abortion entails that biowomen could also relinquish such future parental responsibility by terminating their own pregnancy with the child, and hence, biowomen have the right to relinquish their future parental responsibility for a born child that arises from being persons who were pregnant with the child. Equality of rights and responsibilities then entails that biomen also have parental responsibility for a born child if they are persons who were pregnant with the child. But since circumstances in which biomen are pregnant with a child do not arise, this is an empty parental responsibility for biomen, and whether biomen have a right to terminate a pregnancy with their child to relinquish this empty future responsibility becomes merely a semantic issue.⁷ Thus, one may maintain that no contradiction arises in this case.

Hence, linking parental responsibility to the bodily aspect of pregnancy this way would entail that only biowomen have a *de facto* parental responsibility, in parallel with how only biowomen have a *de facto* right to terminate their own pregnancy and a *de facto* right not to be forced to terminate their own pregnancy. In this case, biomen would at best have an empty parental responsibility, similar to how biomen at best have an

⁷ Here I call a right/responsibility *empty* if it can never be exercised/fulfilled due to the lack of circumstances in which it would be physically feasible to exercise/fulfill it.

empty right to terminate their own pregnancy and an empty right not to be forced to terminate their own pregnancy.

I have not argued above for the existence of a parental responsibility for a born child that arises from being a person who was pregnant with the child, only that such parental responsibility, if existed, could potentially avoid the logical contradiction by appealing to the fact that whether someone has a right to relinquish an empty future responsibility is a semantic issue that may be answered both ways. Merely the fact that the putative existence of such parental responsibility could save us from contradiction can not support the actual existence of such parental responsibility without conducting an exhaustive survey of all other possible sources of parental responsibility and finding that all other possible sources lead to contradiction.

While I cannot conduct such an exhaustive survey here, it is instructive to examine other potential sources that may plausibly give rise to parental responsibility. Consider the following cases: a natural person has parental responsibility for a born child if the person

1. is a biological parent of the child;
2. was pregnant with the child;
3. was a sperm donor for the child;
4. played a causally relevant role in the child's conception;
5. freely gave irrevocable consent to parenting a born child *before* the end of the period in which termination of pregnancy was permissible, but *without* a prior binding promise to not terminate the pregnancy being made by the person pregnant with the child;
6. freely gave irrevocable consent to parenting a born child *before* the end of the period in which termination of pregnancy was permissible, *given that* a prior binding promise to not terminate the pregnancy was made by the person pregnant with the child;
7. freely gave irrevocable consent to parenting a born child *after* the end of the period in which termination of pregnancy was permissible.

Case (1) is the assumption that genuine parental responsibility exists both for biomen and biowomen, which leads to a contradiction with the other premises, as I have discussed throughout the paper. I just addressed case (2) and claimed that it can avoid the contradiction. Case (3) is analogous to case (2), however, it contradicts principle (P*).⁸ Variants of cases (4) and (5) frequently surface in colloquial attribu-

⁸ Note that cases (2) and (3) cannot be combined without contradiction as they entail different conclusions regarding the existence of a non-empty right to relinquish future parental responsibility. Thus, at most one of these two types of parental responsibility can coexist with the other premises.

tions of parental responsibility (“you made the child, so you need to take care of the child,” and “deciding to marry and/or to engage in a consensual unprotected sexual intercourse constitutes a binding consent to accept parental responsibility if a child is born”), while (7) appears in adoptive parenthood.

Mutatis mutandis, the first part of the inferential premise (I1) would apply in cases (1)–(2), (4)–(5), while the second part of the inferential premise (I1) would apply in cases (1), (3)–(7). Thus, in particular, logical contradiction would ensue in cases (4) and (5). The reasoning is completely analogous to case (1).

It is worth emphasizing that these conclusions also hold for some combination of different potential sources of parental responsibility, in particular to a combination of types (1), (4), and (5). So, suppose that a bioman and a biowoman voluntarily enter into a marriage; that they have consensual sexual intercourse with the clearly communicated joint intent of producing a child; that as a result of the intercourse the biowoman conceives; that no spontaneous miscarriage or any other health complications arise for either the mother or the child from carrying pregnancy to its end; that the bioman is the biological father, the biowoman is the biological mother, and that no one has any reason to believe these facts to be otherwise; that before the end of the period in which termination of pregnancy is permissible, the bioman, the biowoman, or both freely give additional explicit irrevocable consent to parenting if the child is born: equality of rights and responsibilities and abortion rights entail that even these “ideal” circumstances cannot result in either the bioman or the biowoman having personal or financial parental responsibility for the born child (and indeed, if there are no other actual sources of parental responsibility that could apply to the bioman or to the biowoman in question, then equality of rights and responsibilities and abortion rights entail that neither the bioman nor the biowoman have any parental responsibility at all). This conclusion may be in conflict with common wisdom and the legal reality of contemporary societies, but it follows from equality of rights and responsibilities, abortion rights, and the inferential premises.

Cases (6) and (7) attempt to get around the contradiction by creating circumstances in which the right to abortion cannot be exercised and hence there is a guarantee that the child is going to be born. The success of case (6) depends on whether the biowoman’s promise not to terminate her pregnancy can indeed be given bindingly enough to override her right to abortion. If it is not possible for a pregnant biowoman to give an irrevocable promise to not terminate her pregnancy that is strong enough to override her right to abortion (without rejecting the right to abortion in general), or if the promise is not made this way, then the first part of inferential premise (I1) would still apply, and a contradiction would ensue. If it is possible for a biowoman to give an irrevocable promise to not terminate her pregnancy that would be strong enough to override her right to abortion (without rejecting that the right to abortion in general exists), then a parental responsibility of type (6) could coexist with equality of rights and responsi-

lities and abortion rights. In case (7), it is clear that the first part of inferential premise (I1) would not apply, and hence a parental responsibility of type (7) could also coexist with equality of rights and responsibilities and abortion rights.

However, a parental responsibility of the binding type (6) or type (7) is still in tension with the impermissibility of allowing born children to die. In both cases, the first half of the inferential premise (I1) was circumvented by establishing a guarantee that the pregnancy will be carried to its end, but since the timing of giving consent to parenting demanded by case (6) and case (7) only comes *after* it is established that the pregnancy will be carried to its end, and since this consent is assumed to be free and hence there is no guarantee that the consent will be given, it follows that if case (6) or (7) were the only sources of parental responsibility, there would be no guarantee that someone would actually have parental responsibility for a child that is going to be born. But someone must take care of a born child, so a parental responsibility of type (6) or (7), even if it exists, cannot provide the only guarantee: ultimately, someone else needs to have parental responsibility.

To sum up, *if* the above survey of potential sources of parental responsibility were exhaustive, we would be forced to arrive at the following conclusion: equality of rights and responsibilities, abortion rights, the impermissibility of allowing born children to die, and the inferential premises imply that if no natural person accepts voluntarily a binding parental responsibility for a born child – an occurrence that cannot be taken for granted –, and if no state-like entity bears ultimate parental responsibility – an option we briefly explore later –, then the only plausible candidate for the ultimate bearer of parental responsibility is the person who, while being pregnant with the child, had the *de facto* right to decide whether the child would be born and hence whether a parental responsibility for a born child would be created. Consequently, under these assumptions biological fathers as biological fathers do not have *any* parental responsibility.

3.4 Rejecting (I1)

One may attempt to reject the inferences of premise (I1). Rejecting the first inference would amount to the view that, although biowomen have parental responsibility for their born children, and by terminating their own pregnancy they would relinquish their future parental responsibility, and in some circumstances, it would be physically feasible for them to terminate their own pregnancy, and the free choice of terminating their own pregnancy is granted by the right to abortion, and biowomen do have the right to abortion, yet biowomen do not have the *right* to relinquish their future parental responsibility.

This view would run against how we are arguing, in similar contexts, for the existence of rights. Consider, for instance, the bodily autonomy-based justification

of the right to abortion.⁹ How does a *right to abortion* follow from the *right to decide what happens in and to your body* (the right to bodily autonomy) in such an argument? Clearly, the right to decide what happens in and to someone's body implies that a biowoman can make a free choice regarding, say, taking an abortion pill, which would then result in the particular consequence that the biowoman's own pregnancy with her child is terminated. But does a particular consequence (C) of exercising an existing right entail the existence of a *right to* (C)? It seems that a bodily autonomy-based justification implicitly relies on this principle to infer from the right to bodily autonomy to the right to abortion, and fails without it. But then, analogously, the same principle of inferring from a general to a particular right establishes the existence of the right to relinquish their future parental responsibility for biowomen, if biowomen have the right to abortion and exercising the right to abortion results in the vacation of future parental responsibility.

That the inferences embodied in inferential premise (I1) are difficult to reject can also be seen by noting that they are essentially instances of the following plausible inference scheme: if *p* if and only if *q*, then there is a right to *p* if and only if there is a right to *q*. One could argue that, with suitable identifications, premise (I1) becomes a theorem of standard deontic logic, hence it is indeed inferential in nature, but this line of reasoning shall be pursued elsewhere.

3.5 Rejecting (I2)

If the outcome of a choice of one person functionally determines the outcome of a choice of another person, at most one of the two persons can make their choice freely. If, in this case, the choice of one of the two persons is always effective, say, because a right grants her the freedom of her choice, then the other person cannot have a right to his choice. If a person has a right, and if circumstances arise in which exercising the right would be physically feasible for the person, then at least in some of these circumstances the person should be able to exercise his right.

The second inferential premise expresses that this is the situation in the case of pregnancy: if abortion rights allocate the freedom of choice regarding the termination of pregnancy to the biowomen then, since the outcome of the choice of a biowoman regarding her own pregnancy determines the outcome of the choice of a biomen regarding the same pregnancy, biomen cannot have the right to terminate a pregnancy with their child. As far as I can see, the only way to reject this conclusion is to separate whether a certain right exists from whether said right can be exercised in any arising circumstances, and to say that although biomen have

⁹ See Thomson 1971.

a right to terminate a pregnancy with their child, and circumstances in which it would be physically feasible to exercise this right exist (as we sadly know from stories of domestic abuse), yet this right can never be exercised. Clearly, no defenders of rights (in particular, no defenders of the right to abortion) would be content with allowing for such a separation.

4. Concluding remarks

Assuming that the right not to be forced to have an abortion, the impermissibility of allowing born children to die, and the inferential premises are not in doubt, we have three main options. First, if we assume there is a right to abortion and there is genuine parental responsibility, it follows that persons do not have the same rights and responsibilities. The most conservative violation of equality of rights and responsibilities would only entail that biowomen have more rights than biomen, however, violation of equality also makes it plausible that biomen have reduced parental responsibilities compared to biowomen. Second, if we assume equality of rights and responsibilities and that there is genuine parental responsibility, it follows that there is no right to abortion; I argued that this limits certain justification attempts of the right to abortion (such as that of Réz) that go beyond its bodily autonomy-based justification. Third, if we assume equality of rights and responsibilities and the right to abortion, it follows that there is no genuine parental responsibility: in particular, biological fathers as biological fathers have no parental responsibility.

Thus, it would seem prudent for those who accept equality of rights and responsibilities and advocate for legal recognition of the right to abortion to also concurrently advocate for the abolition of mandatory child support, at least for biological fathers. That the outcome of the choice of a biowoman regarding terminating her own pregnancy determines the outcome of the choice of a bioman regarding terminating the same pregnancy is a matter of laws of nature. But that the outcome of the choice of a biowoman regarding terminating her pregnancy determines the outcome of the choice of a bioman regarding his parental responsibility is a matter of laws of people. Laws of people can be changed to enable freedom of choice regarding parental responsibility, and thereby also bring society a step closer to equality of rights and responsibilities.

Staying with the third option, since there is no guarantee that any natural person would voluntarily accept a binding parental responsibility for a born child, I argued that only two plausible candidates seem to be forthcoming as ultimate bearers of parental responsibility: either the person who, while being pregnant with the child, had the *de facto* right to decide whether the child would be born and hence whether a parental responsibility for a born child would be created, or a state-like entity. It seems clear that if all parental responsibility rested solely on persons who carry out a pregnancy, grave

consequences would ensue not only to them, but also to their children. Nevertheless, we should more openly and explicitly discuss to what extent such harm justifies the currently widespread alternative harm of forcing persons to carry the significant burden of raising children against their will because their right to relinquish future parental responsibility is denied (either via the denial of the right to abortion or the via denial of equality of rights). In tandem, we should also more openly and explicitly address the question of whether the ultimate bearer of parental responsibility is indeed a natural person, or maybe, instead, a state-like entity.

If, instead of a natural person, the ultimate bearer of parental responsibility is the state, it would seem prudent for the state to cover the financial cost of raising children, and to provide compensation for natural persons in exchange for their voluntary work to raise (presumably typically their own) children. In turn, such societal arrangement would erode the special status of parents to make major decisions about the lives of their children, since parental responsibility, and hence also the burden of making major decisions that are in the best interest of the children would ultimately rest on the shoulders of the state. Although these are not *logical* consequences, it is difficult to see other ways to thoroughly implement a recognition that neither biological parents have parental responsibility as biological parents, only the state has. These and such societal consequences should, however, be further addressed in depth elsewhere.

Since equality of rights and responsibilities, as well as the right to abortion, can be loosely characterized as “liberal” views, but rejection of genuine parental responsibility is not presently considered as such, the jointly inconsistent premises also exemplify a set of inconsistent beliefs held by liberal-minded thinkers – an interesting phenomenon in its own right.

In the end, we do not face an easy choice. To escape the logical contradiction, we must reject at least one of the five premises. Rejecting the premises is logically equivalent with making the following statements, respectively:

Rejecting (P1): biologically different persons do not have the same rights and responsibilities.
Rejecting (P2): a person can be forced to have an abortion against their will and/or there is no right to abortion.

Rejecting (P3): we can let born children die and/or biological fathers do not have any parental responsibility.

Rejecting (I1): a particular consequence (e.g., abortion) of exercising an existing right (e.g., the right to bodily autonomy) does not entail that a right to the particular consequence (viz. the right to abortion) exists.

Rejecting (I2): it is reasonable to maintain that a person has a right (e.g., the right to abortion) but this right can never be exercised, despite that circumstances in which it would be physically feasible to exercise the right exist.

Would it cause us discomfort to publicly state our support for one of these statements? Would we risk our social standing, perhaps even our jobs, by doing so? Affirmative answers indicate that the resolution of the philosophical problem is neither obvious, nor socially inconsequential, and also cast a dark shadow on the current state of open public discourse.

Bibliography

- Jaggar, Alison M. 1973. "Abortion and a Woman's Right to Decide." *Philosophical Forum* 5/1: 347–60. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429499142-43>
- Jaggar, Alison M. 1997. "Regendering the U.S. Abortion Debate." *Journal of Social Philosophy* 28/1: 127–40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.1997.tb00368.x>
- Markowitz, Sally. 1990. "Abortion and Feminism." *Social Theory and Practice* 16/1: 1–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5840/soctheorpract19901611>
- Réz, Anna. 2021. "A Feminist Ethics of Abortion." *Elpis* 14/1: 45–58. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.54310/Elpis.2021.1.4>
- Thomson, Judith Jarvis. 1971. "A Defense of Abortion." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1: 47–66. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-6561-1_6