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What were the legal and social effects of contraception and abortion in Classical Athens

Contraception, abortion, and infanticide had many overlaps in classical Athens each however had their own legal and social implications within the Athenian Society which differed depending on the circumstance.

Contraception and abortion were considered acceptable by Athenian culture as is described in Hippocrates' Nature of the child. Wherein it is described that a woman who did not wish to have a child expelled her fetus. From this information it can be interpreted by way of exception as the woman is described as belonging to a friend of Hippocrates, most likely meaning that she is a slave and thereby property and her value would decrease as a result of prolonged pregnancy. However, the circumstance could very well be different as a citizen having an abortion was prohibited by Athenian law due to the chance that her husband could potentially die during her pregnancy.

Contraceptives that can be compared to their modern counterparts in classical Athens were generally taken orally as conception was believed to be a process where the sperm was cooked inside the womb and it was known by Hippocrates that the fetus was affected by the mother's habits and consumption. Infanticide and late-stage abortion are considered a crime against the father of the infant as the child is viewed as his property, not the mothers. There is also the uncertainty of complications at birth which can lead to exposure. This would most likely be in the case of disability in the infant as the child would apply stress on the resources of not only the family group the child belonged, to but the overall poleis as well and if it could not feasibly survive to adulthood. The risks of the child dying of disease were usually the tipping factor. The social effects of infanticide and abortions are usually kept within the Oikos. As it is the head of the family group who decides how to punish an attempted or successful abortion or makes the decision on whether to expose the child.

A part of the social acceptableness of infanticide, abortion or contraception could be attributed to a form of family planning with contraception being the more acceptable of the three. The use of contraceptives could also depend on the line of work a woman may be employed as they may need to use many contraceptives, prostitutes, for example, will need to make extensive use of contraceptives.

As a result, the social and legal effects of abortion and infanticide are blurred whereas what was acknowledged as a contraceptive was commonly permitted by the overall polies of Athens.

[Hippocrates, *Nat. Puer 1.3*] [Aristot. pol 1335b] [Bissa Lecture] [Am. 2,14-18] Word Count 442

Aristotle, *Politics* H.Rackham (Trans) 1932 Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Hippocrates, *Generation, nature of the Child, Diseases, Nature of Women and Barrenness* Paul Potter (Trans) 2012 Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Ovid. *Heroides, Amores.* Grant Showerman (Trans) G.P Goold (Rev) 1914 Cambridge: Harvard University press