

Judith Thomson

The naïve argument

→ consider a standard pro-life position:

- 1) a fetus is a human being from the moment of conception
- 2) every person has a right to life
- 3) one person's right to life outweighs another's right to decide what to do w/ their body
- 4) the right to life of a fetus, thereby, outweighs the mother's right to decide what to do w/ her body
- 5) so, abortion is morally impermissible

↳ Thomson argues the first premise is naïve and the others are uncontroversial

The violinist

→ consider premise 3: one person's right to life outweighs another's right to decide what to do w/ their body

· you wake up w/ an unconscious famous violinist, and only you can save him if you 'plug-in' to him for 9 months

↳ are you morally required to keep the violinist plugged-in?

· Some say maybe → but what if it was for your whole life? (similar to how a child needs to be raised after birth)

→ Thomson says this would be outrageous, and therefore premise 3 cannot be correct

The Extreme view: the innocent's life trumps all

→ abortion is morally wrong even if the mother will die w/ out an abortion

· directly killing an innocent person is always impermissible

· directly killing is murder, and murder is always impermissible

· one's duty to refrain from killing is more important than one's duty to keep a person from dying

· one should 'let die' instead of kill

→ Thomson argues these are false claims (driver + McCluskey case, Thomson, bystander + McCluskey case, euthanasia)

· focus on principle b and consider: what if keeping the violinist plugged in, you will also be dead → would that be

killing an "innocent" person? no → you cannot decide that it is impermissible

→ consider a crushing fetus: if carrying the baby will kill you, it's not impermissible to kill it

The Impartiality view: it is impermissible for the doctor to perform an abortion even if the mother will die w/ out one

→ an abortion would be permissible if it was performed by the mother herself (out of self defense from the fetus that would kill her) out of her right to life; right does not extend to a 3rd party to perform the abortion for her → doctor should be impartial

• homeowner case: mother and fetus are like tenants in a house that has been rented to both, but the mother owns the house

↳ mother owns her own body and should be able to choose what happens w/ her body and she can give permission to a doctor to perform an abortion to save her own life

Life necessities view: The fetus has a right to life and to what is necessary to sustaining its life (womb), except when another's life is at risk

↳ opponent concedes abortion as permissible when the mother's life is at risk → but impermissible when mother's life isn't at risk

• the fetus' right to life trumps the mother's right to control her own body and entitles it to whatever is necessary for it to survive

→ Thomson claims it is mistaken to think that a right to life entitles other rights

• the Henry Fonda case: if I am sick and the only thing that will save me is Henry Fonda's handshake, but I have no right to his handshake

↳ a right to life does not confer a right to all the things needed for life (I don't have a right to Henry Fonda's cool hand and the fetus doesn't have a right to the mother's body)

The Voluntary View: the fetus has a right to the mother's body in the case that the mother voluntarily conceived the baby

↳ opponent concedes that abortion is permissible in the case of involuntary conception

(sexual assault), but impermissible when it's voluntary

→ Thomson claims that in cases of negligence (unprotected sex) may make abortion impermissible BUT if you take precautions to avoid getting pregnant, should it be impermissible still because you have partial responsibility (ex: pill is ineffective .1%)

- The Burglar case: if the room is stuffy so you open the window and a burglar came in → are you responsible for the burglar coming in even though you locked the door and took precautions

- *absurd to suggest that if you don't want burglars then don't have windows (abstinence shouldn't be suggested as the only option)

- The people-seeds case: imagine if people grew from pollen seeds. You don't want a child so you put screens in. But a seed floats through the screen and takes root → does that person seed have a right to your house

→ Thomson says no, you can pluck the person-seed when it's a growing weed