

Abortion (Warren)

Simple argument against abortion:

1. It's wrong to kill innocent human beings
2. Fetuses are innocent human beings.
3. It's wrong to kill fetuses.
4. Abortion is the killing of fetuses.
5. Abortion is wrong.

Equivocation

1. A plane is a tool for shaving wood.
2. Boeing makes planes.
3. Therefore, Boeing makes tools for shaving wood.

To equivocate is to use one word in two different ways.

‘human being’--full fledged member of the moral community

‘human being’--member of species homo sapiens

Simple argument succeeds by equivocating

(1) is uncontroversially true using the “moral sense,” but then the second premise is not obviously true.

(2) is uncontroversially true using the “genetic sense,” but then the first premise is not obviously true.

If we don't equivocate, the argument *begs the question*.

[Begging the question, contrary to popular usage, does not

mean “raises the question.” It has a very specific meaning in philosophy. To beg the question against someone is to assume what you’re trying to prove. The simple argument begs the question, if we use the moral sense, by assuming without argument that the fetus is a human in that sense. But that’s precisely what’s at issue.]

‘Person’--human in the moral sense

‘Human’--human in the genetic sense

Is being human sufficient for being a person?

Alien thought experiment

Warren’s criteria for personhood:

1. consciousness
2. reasoning
3. self-motivated activity
4. capacity to communicate
5. self-awareness

You don’t have to satisfy all of these, but some combination of 1-5 is necessary and sufficient for being a person.

If you lack all of these, you’re not a person.

The fetus lacks all of these, so not person, so lacks moral rights

Resemblance to persons: maybe a being that is enough like a person has some rights of persons.

Warren: “if the right to life of a fetus is to be based upon its resemblance to a person, then it cannot be said to have any more right to life than...a newborn guppy”

The rights of potential people:

They may have rights, but they don't outweigh any of the rights of actual people.

Alien example 2.0

Hey, wait, doesn't this justify infanticide, too?

Warren: “when an unwanted or defective infant is born into a society which cannot afford and/or is not willing to care for it, then its destruction is permissible.”

But this is not normally the case, so infanticide is generally wrong, even though infants aren't persons.

The key difference for Warren is that, once born, the mother's rights are no longer an issue.