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"common man"1. a
doctor is

[Art & Culture](#), [Music](#)



Have you ever had a moment that you were so infuriated by someone's words and actions, you are unsure what you were going to do? You want to stand up and pick the fight, even if you are uncertain how it's going to end. I believe that Thomson is having one of those moments, where she is infuriated by the actions of pro-life activists and their attempt to misconstrue facts in order to reach their end goal.

Their end goal being of course having the woman keep the baby and diminishing the right to an abortion. Thomson strategizes that by granting the opponents premises, primarily for the argument's sake, abortion is morally permissible. She begins by discussing how pro-life activists define the point where life begins- in which she determines that personhood does not begin upon conception- and quickly moves on to the "right to life" 1 and privileges that are therefore granted. She attempts to sway viewer's that pro-life activists have no moral standing and that by attacking the premises that fetuses are persons and persons have a right to life, therefore abortion is morally permissible. Thomson's main argument revolves around the difference between a "right to life" 1 and the right to use someone else's body- primarily how the two are not interdependent on the other. The idea of consent also plays a role within Thomson's argument. A man, a woman, a child, an infant, and a fetus all have something in common with each other.

According to Thomson, "every person has a right to life" (Thomson 128). Although this is considered "common knowledge" 1, the audience is forced to analyze the moral implications exploited within these seven words. First,

the " person" 1 must be defined as to when a person's life begins and where it ceases.

This quickly becomes a grey area. Does a person's life begin when they're conceived? Does a person's life end when brain activity ceases? What if their heart is still beating? A doctor may answer differently than the " common man" 1. A doctor is more likely to give a textbook definition, whereas a " common man" 1 is far more likely to give an opinion-based response.

Secondly, the " right to life" 1 is considered a " negative right" 1- " a right to be left alone, to be free from the interference of others to act autonomously" (Veatch 70). Thomson is not trying to demonstrate that people can do whatever they please, but to demonstrate that all the " negative right" 1 seems to cover in this case is the right to not be killed unjustly. She states, " In some views having a right to life includes having a right to be given at least the bare minimum one needs for continued life. But suppose that what in fact is the bare minimum a man needs for continued life is something he has no right at all to be given?.

.. nobody has the right against you that you shall give him this right" (Thomson 131).

Thomson decides that, for the sake of argument, we shall just say a fetus is a human, since it does not matter to the surrounding argument- this is because the fetus does not have the right to use the mother's body. The fetus's " right to life" 1 and the right to use someone else's body are not interdependent on the other. The first premise Thomson chooses to grant is that the " fetus is a person from the moment of conception" (Thomson 128). She

defends the permissibility of abortion though through the violinist case.

Thomson states, " You wake up in the morning and find yourself back to back in a bed with an unconscious violinist... He has been found to have a fatal kidney ailment, and the Society of Music Lovers has canvassed all the available medical records and found that you alone have the right blood type to help.

They have therefore kidnapped you, and last night the violinist's circulatory system was plugged into yours, so that your kidneys can be used to extract poisons from his blood as well as your own... To unplug you would be to kill him...it's only for nine months. By then he will have recovered from his ailment, and can safely be unplugged from you" (Thomson 128). This analogy is used as part of her strategy to exemplify the absurd views pro-life activists believe. She forces the audience to consider if the woman has any moral obligation to keep the man alive. If so, does it matter that the woman was involuntarily put into that situation? Through the potential limits on the "right to life" 1-given that the "right to life" 1 does not include the right to use someone else's body for your own personal gain- you can permissibly remove yourself from the violinist. It is your right to do so and Thomson would argue that " if you do allow him to go on using your kidneys, this is a kindness on your part, and not something he can claim from you as his due" (Thomson 131). When this is applied to a mother and a fetus, it is argued that the fetus's "right to life" 1 is not violated for the same reason the violinist's "right to life" 1 isn't- the fetus is merely deprived of the use of the woman's body. One potential criticism to the violinist case is that it can justify abortion

only in cases of rape, as the woman was kidnapped and did not consent to having the violinist plugged in.

It is understood that generally when a woman decides upon an abortion, it is due to a voluntary act. I believe that Thomson's violinist case can be applied to various cases of abortion, both voluntary and involuntary. The consent is not what drafts this example, but the idea that the violinist does not have a right to use another's body for personal gain. Another potential criticism to this case is that the violinist is a stranger, whereas the fetus is the woman's flesh and blood.

The fetus has never been met and therefore is a stranger as well, using the woman as a vessel does not make you any more known than the violinist. The next premise Thomson argues against is that "If she voluntarily called it into existence, how can she now kill it" (Thomson 132). The term "voluntarily" 1 can be easily misconstrued and Thomson demonstrates this with a "people-seeds" 1 example.

Thomson states, "people-seeds drift about in the air like pollen, and if you open your windows, one may drift in and take root in your carpets or upholstery. You don't want children so you fix up your windows with fine mesh screens the very best you can buy. As it happens, however, and on very, very rare occasions does happen, one of the screens is defective, and a seed drifts in and takes root" (Thomson 133). In this analogy, the screens exemplify the contraception a woman would use if she did not want "people-seeds" 1 - a fetus - residing in her house - the woman's body. She took every possible course of action to protect herself - except maybe abstinence - and a

" people-seed" 1still manages to get through. She should still be able to get rid of the " people-seeds" 1if one gets in and states that " after all you could have lived out your lifewith bare floors and furniture, or with sealed windows and doors.

But this won'tdo - for by the same token anyone can avoid a pregnancy due to rape by having ahysterectomy, or anyways by never leaving home without a (reliable!) army"(Thomson 133). This is a bit extreme, but it raises the main issue on whatdefines abortions as an unjust killing. One potential criticism to this exampleis that " people-seeds" 1 are an absurd representation of how atypical pregnancy works. It is just that though, a typical pregnancy analogy. It may have some absurd details, but that is used to demonstrate the potentialextreme lengths one would be willing to go to in order to not conceive a child. In regards to abortion, Thomsonstates, " we are told that performing the abortion would be directly killing thechild, whereas doing nothing would not be killing the mother, but only lettingher die" (Thomson 129). Killing someone or letting someone die can cause severeemotional distress on the person performing the act, but within Thomson'sstatement, the audience is forced to analyze what they would do if put in thatsituation. Would you rather kill the child or would you rather kill the mother? Most would choose to choose the child, since the mother would still be alive tohave more children, but if you disagree with abortion in any circumstance, thenthe choice is made.

A " mother's sacrifice" 1 for the child would bemade, so that the child had every opportunity to pursue a long and healthylife, even if it meant her own

demise. Some mothers may choose this "greater good" 1, but having society dictate what is the appropriate course of action can lead to a stir. Thomson uses this argument, not to necessarily change topics to killing and letting die, but to demonstrate the pro-life activist's idea that they can determine what the foremost right is impermissible. One potential criticism is that abortion directly and intentionally kills the fetus, whereas- as I mentioned in the violinist example- unplugging the violinist merely lets him die of natural causes. The differentiation between killing and letting die is not what Thomson is discussing in this article though. Her argument is drafted around abortion and the moral argument of killing and letting die should not hold any factors within the oppositional debate.

Is the "greater good" 1 always permissible though? Most of the time what society dictates to be correct is what is to be taken as the foremost right. The problem is that society is known to make many exceptions to when abortion is to be considered morally permissible. Thomson states, "They can say that persons have a right to life only if they didn't come into existence because of rape; or they can say that all persons have a right to life, but that some have less of a right to life than others, in particular, that those who came into existence because of rape" (Thomson 128). During this argument, Thomson tries to demonstrate to the audience how pro-life activists can create a "barrier" 1 in order to distance themselves from a scenario in which a woman is impregnated through rape. The woman had no choice in the matter if the man forced himself upon her.

Thomson tries to point out that abortion has quickly become an "if and only if" scenario, in which what would not normally be considered morally permissible has swayed and quickly become permissible by altering some of the factors. Thomson does quite well in this argument by ruling out what others may negate. By using an "if and only if" scenario, she allows the audience to determine deniability in each argument pro-life activists may have drafted in regards to rape victims. If they are so quickly swayed by a single factor, what standing do they truly have? Thomson moves on to state, "Nor do they make an exception for a case in which the mother has to spend the nine months of her pregnancy in bed. They would agree that would be a great pity, and hard on the mother, but at the same time, all persons have a right to life" (Thomson 128). Similar to the last quote, Thomson tries to exemplify another situation in which abortion would be considered morally permissible.

Thomson argues, quite favorably, that expecting someone to stay on bed rest for such an incredible time span is a bit absurd to ask of someone. If they would like to choose that for themselves, so be it, but forcing someone to stay bedridden for so long is not something that should be asked of anyone. In both of these examples, Thomson's strategy is to attack the conclusion, but to grant the premises. By granting the premises, it is one less argument that needs to occur. For both of the examples, the premises do not align with the conclusion. So, if her analysis is correct, her opponent must demonstrate to the audience that abortion is an unjust killing. Throughout the entirety of the Thomson reading on abortion, Thomson discusses what

she considers to be a human right. She argues against pro-life counterparts to "heighten" the pro-choice viewpoint.

She believes that everyone has a right to life- or at least a right to not be killed unjustly-, but there are limitations to that right given certain circumstances and that given the circumstance, the woman should be given the right to choose to have an abortion. Thomson even demonstrates this by depicting scenarios in which abortion would be considered morally permissible and granting pro-life activists premises. By granting their premises, it forces pro-life activists to demonstrate that abortion is an unjust killing.