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### If Abortion is Morally Permissible, is Infanticide Also Morally Permissible?

In this essay I will argue that if abortion is morally permissible, infanticide is equally permissible. In order to do this, I will first address Tooley's definition of a person. I will then apply the self-consciousness principle as proposed by Tooley to both abortion and infanticide and argue against Degrazia and Marquis's objections to it. Marquis's potentiality principle will be rejected using Tooley's argument. I will lastly address Thomson's argument as well as the relative-time interest account to further show how infanticide is morally permissible if one assumes abortion is permissible.

The pro-choice stance, of which is responsible for accepting abortion as morally permissible, finds difficulty in distinguishing how their ideas permit abortion but not infanticide. The pro-choicer generally tries to identify ways to show fetuses are not persons by using different principles that will be analyzed later. This liberal view of abortion aims to find a cutoff point in a fetus's development of which up to this point, it is morally permissible to abort the baby. However, as Tooley makes clear, the process of development "is one of gradual and continuous change", so how is it possible to draw a definite boundary and avoid the arbitrariness of that point (Tooley (1972) p. 44)? Besides from that, they must also find a morally relevant difference between one stage of development and the later. Because of the inconsistency of the liberal view, I believe if one views abortion as morally permissible, then they are inclined to view infanticide as also morally permissible. It all comes down to the underlying question of

what makes something a person (Tooley (1972) p. 39). Before I can attempt to answer this, it is important to define how the word “person” will be used in this essay. A person is defined as someone who possesses a serious right to life, which is not to be mistaken with the term “human being” which only implies membership to the species of *Homo sapiens* (Tooley (1972) p. 43). I will explore different principles and ideas that seek to answer the question of what entities have a serious right to life.

The first principle often used to define what constitutes a person and to defend abortion is the self-consciousness requirement, which if one accepts, should also be applied to the defense of infanticide. Tooley defines this requirement as one possessing “the concept of a self as a continuing subject of experiences and other mental states and believes that it is itself such a continuing entity.” (Tooley (1972) p. 44). Tooley argues if this requirement is fulfilled, then one has a serious right to life (Tooley (1972) p. 44). This self-consciousness idea can be simplified by saying if one desires to continue its existence, and thus can acknowledge that itself is in existence, then it has the right to life. It also entails that one’s right to life cannot be violated if one does not have the conceptual capability to desire something in the first place. In light of this principle, I think everyone would agree that fetuses, at any stage of development, do not meet this requirement. Additionally, if one agrees to the validity of this principle in regards to determining a fetus’s right to life, then there is no possible way for them to argue it would not apply to infants. Fetuses as well as infants lack the consciousness to desire their own existence, so based on this idea, infanticide and abortion must be morally equivalent and permissible. One objection to the self-consciousness requirement proposed by Degrazia is that we are essentially embodied minds, and our personal identity is rooted in the functioning of the same brain that will allow one to generate consciousness (Degrazia (2003) p. 419). Therefore, one becomes a person

when they obtain this capacity for consciousness which is about five months after conception. However, one who accepts Tooley's self-consciousness requirement would most likely argue that a person does not have a right to life until the moment their own consciousness can be understood by themselves.

Marquis objects that the connection between psychological criteria for being defined as a person and the wrongness of killing is too arbitrary (Marquis (1989) p. 187). A valid example Marquis used to argue his point was that of a suicidal person. The right to life based on one's desire to live is unsuitable on this account because though one may not necessarily desire to live, such as the suicidal, this does not mean they are no longer considered a person. This can also be applied to those in a coma because though they are unconscious and unable to desire their continued existence, this does not mean they are no longer considered a person, and furthermore denied the right to life. Marquis uses this objection to argue neither abortion nor infanticide can be deemed moral by this principle. This further demonstrates that most principles apply equally to both infanticide and abortion, and it is very difficult to apply a principle to one and not the other. So, when one applies an argument to the support of abortion, I believe it is equally applicable to infanticide as well, and one should be held responsible for this. It is too inconsistent and arbitrary to apply a principle to a fetus but not an infant.

Marquis believes a very convincing argument of what makes someone a person is one based on the potentiality principle (Marquis (1989) p. 200). Using the potentiality principle, I will argue how when this principle is rejected by the pro-choice argument, it further proves infanticide as morally permissible assuming that one believes abortion is also permissible. Marquis argues that we must first confront the question of why killing is morally wrong before we can decide what is considered wrong to kill (Marquis (1989) p. 189). He concludes that

killing is so wrong because it “deprives one of all the experiences, activities, projects, and enjoyments that would otherwise have constituted one's future”, which defines the potentiality principle (Marquis (1989) p. 189). It is not necessarily the loss of life that constitutes killing as amoral but the loss of the victim’s future and all that encompasses. So, Marquis claims that it is wrong to kill both fetuses and infants because they will be deprived of their future value (Marquis (1989) p. 193). However, for the sake of this essay, I am assuming abortion is permissible, and therefore arguing that the potentiality principle is invalid. Someone like Tooley would object that the wrongness in killing is not related to the future value of something but the fact that it interferes with the fulfillment of a fundamental desire to live of which requires consciousness (Tooley (1972) p. 44). The potentiality principle is now disregarded meaning one believes the right to life has nothing to do with future value of the potential person, so it is permissible to abort a fetus. If one accepts the fact that abortion is permissible because only current, and not future, value should be considered, then they must also accept that infanticide is morally permissible. Neither an infant nor a fetus yet possesses the characteristics that an adult person possesses, so they do not yet hold value and should not have the same right to life that an adult has.

On the other hand, Thomson defends abortion on the premise that a right to life does not mean a right to the continued use of another’s body (Thomson (1971) p. 56). This argument can be applied to the defense of infanticide as well. Thomson does believe that a fetus has a right to life nonetheless, but also the mother has a right to discontinue a fetus using her body (Thomson (1971) p. 56). Based on Thomson’s argument, if a mother does not have a moral duty to allow the fetus to continue using her body, the same could be true for an infant, who also relies on the mother’s body for survival. The mother’s body is essential for newborns such as the fetus’s food

source and the formation of an important relationship for newborn's development through skin-to-skin contact. If one sees abortion as being permissible because they do not have the right to use the mother's body for survival, then they must also see infanticide as permissible. Thomson argues that the fetus is dependent on the mother but rejects that this means the mother has a responsibility for it and hence a right against the mother (Thomson (1971) p. 58). So similarly, since an infant is dependent on the mother's body, and Thomas does not see this as meaning the mother has a responsibility for the infant, infanticide is morally permissible. A possible objection to this argument is that an infant can survive without using the mother's body such as when an infant is adopted. However, the point of this argument is to show that if one believes a fetus does not have the right to use someone else's body and so abortion is permissible, then it is equally permissible to end the life of an infant that is also depending on someone else's body.

Liao argues that if the time-relative interest account is used to permit abortion, it also permits infanticide. Liao defines time-relative interests as the capability to "stand in some psychological relations to one's future and past selves." (Liao (2007) p. 244). The strength of this characteristic is based on the amount one is invested into their future and past. One can assume that having a minimum level of psychological capabilities means one has a minimum level of time-relative interests. Therefore, something with a less than minimum time-relative interest has very little or no concern with their future or past selves and does not have the right to life. This principle is illustrated when looking at an example of a fetus and a 40-year-old. Even though a fetus has a more valuable future, it is not invested in its future or past self, whereas the 40-year-old is very invested in both. So those who support this principle believe it is more wrong to kill the 40-year-old than the fetus. Liao then applies this concept to infanticide (Liao (2007) p. 251). Infants clearly have a less than minimum time-relative interest because they do

not have the ability to think or feel concern about their futures. Therefore, based on this principle, if one believes low time-relative interest permits abortion, then they must also hold this belief when discussing infanticide. Degrazia similarly argues that the time-relative interests account permits abortion and leaves the morality of infanticide “uncomfortably open.” (Degrazia (2003) p. 429). A possible objection to this claim would involve a way of showing that newborns have a higher time-relative interest in some way. An example presented by Liao is one saying that newborns differ because they are exposed to a great deal of external stimuli upon birth which increases their psychological development, and thus time-relative interest. However, Liao rejects this objection by explaining that if a fetus was born in a dark room and psychological stimuli was minimized, that would not make infanticide more acceptable (Liao (2007) p. 253). I believe the time-relative interests account is the most convincing to demonstrate that if one sees abortion as morally permissible, then one must also see infanticide as morally permissible.

In conclusion, I have shown that if one considers abortion to be permissible, then one must consider infanticide permissible. To believe that a fetus is not a person based on lack of consciousness, time-relative interests, or current value, they must also believe an infant is not a person on this basis. Since the right to life does not mean one also has the right to use another’s body, a fetus and infant are both denied this right because of their physical dependency on the mother. As shown, many pro-choice arguments can be applied to the permissibility of infanticide in some way, which I believe shows the need for further reflection in this area.

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