

Judith Jarvis Thomson's paper "A Defense of Abortion" was first published in 1971 and stands as one of the most famous and influential works on the ethics of abortion. In this paper, Thomson seeks to challenge the pro-life claim that abortion is impermissible solely because the fetus is considered a person. She argues that personhood does not decisively settle the matter, and the permissibility or impermissibility of abortion depends on how the fetus relates to its mother. To support her viewpoint, she presents three thought experiments.

The Violinist Argument: Thomson begins her paper with a thought experiment known as the *violinist argument*. She asks us to imagine that we wake up one day attached to a famous violinist who needs our body to survive. We did not consent to this attachment, and the violinist's survival is dependent on us remaining attached for nine months. Thomson argues that we have the right to detach ourselves from the violinist, even if it means his death, because we have the right to control our own bodies.

What about the fetus' right to life? She concedes that fetuses are persons with a right to life, *but* argues that this does not necessarily mean that abortion is always wrong. She uses the example of a person who is threatened with the loss of her own life if she carries a pregnancy to term. In this case, Thomson argues, the woman has the right to abort the fetus, even though it is a person with a right to life. This is because the woman's right to life is *greater* than the fetus's right to life. To this end she introduces us to the *expanding child*.

The Expanding Child Argument: Thomson asks us to imagine waking up one morning with a violinist connected to our circulatory system without our consent. The violinist requires this connection for survival, and detaching prematurely would result in the violinist's death. Thomson uses this analogy to argue that even if we grant the fetus a right to life, a woman still has the right to decide whether to sustain the fetus's life at the cost of her bodily autonomy. The thought experiment challenges simplistic views on the morality of abortion by emphasizing the importance of a woman's right to control her own body.

Thomson goes on to argue that the morality of abortion depends on the circumstances of the pregnancy. She uses the example of the trolley problem to illustrate her point. In the trolley problem, a person is faced with the choice of diverting a trolley to kill one person or letting it continue on its course to kill five people. Thomson argues that just as it is morally permissible to divert the trolley to save five lives, it is also morally permissible to abort a fetus to save the life of the woman carrying it.

Thomson anticipates an objection to her argument based on the idea that women who engage in *consensual* sex are responsible for any resulting pregnancy. She argues that even if a woman is responsible for becoming pregnant, she does not forfeit the right to control her own body. She also points out that this objection would only apply to cases where the woman had a choice in the matter, and not to cases where her consent was violated. To this end she introduces us to the *people-seed* thought experiment:

People-Seeds: Imagine a tiny "people seed" that floats in the air and can potentially embed itself in someone's clothing, leading to pregnancy. She uses this analogy to illustrate that even if a woman takes every precaution to avoid pregnancy, the potential for unwanted conception still exists. Certainly we don't think that unless a biological woman has a hysterectomy, she must keep an unwanted pregnancy caused by consensual sex (as that would remove all possibility of pregnancy). Thomson argues that the right to life of a fetus does not necessarily grant it the right to use a woman's body without her consent, drawing attention to the complexities of bodily autonomy and the moral nuances surrounding abortion.

Finally, Thomson addresses what she calls "the extreme view," which holds that abortion is never morally permissible. She argues that this view is untenable, because it would require us to give fetuses *greater* rights than we give to born persons. She also argues that the extreme view is incompatible with our intuitions about bodily autonomy and the right to life.