

Synthesis Chapter:

how the various views
we've covered apply to
the morality of abortion



A nonconsequentialist argument:

Killing innocent human life is seriously wrong.

A fetus is innocent human life.

∴ Killing a fetus is seriously wrong.

Problems with this reasoning:

- For which sense of “human” is it true that killing innocent *human life* is seriously wrong? “Human” can mean various things, for example: (1) a born or unborn member of *homo sapiens*, (2) a born member of *homo sapiens*, (3) an animal who reasons.
- This is like asking when it becomes seriously wrong to kill an innocent actual-or-potential human being: from conception, individuation, brain waves, viability, birth, or rationality? People with different backgrounds have conflicting intuitions about this.



A consequentialist argument:

Whatever maximizes good consequences is right.

Many abortions maximize good consequences.

∴ Many abortions are right.

Problems with this reasoning:

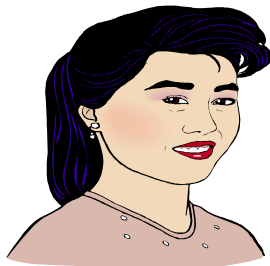
- Do abortions have bad consequences too (for example, by harming women psychologically and promoting callous attitudes toward human life)?
- Is the consequentialist premise deeply flawed?
- Rule utilitarianism asks: “What rule about killing would have the best consequences for society to follow?”

Metaethics
asks:

“How should we
pick our moral
principles –
including ones
about abortion?”

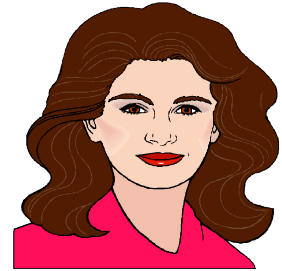


Cultural
relativism



Subjectivism
& emotivism

Supernaturalism



Intuitionism



Prescriptivism &
Ideal Observer



Virtue

Virtue theory can perhaps contribute by asking whether most women who have abortions are otherwise virtuous and of admirable character. Some say NO.

Natural law can perhaps contribute by its principle of double effect. While it's wrong to directly kill the fetus, it can be permissible to perform an operation that will likely have the death of the fetus as an unintended side effect.

Natural Law

The golden-rule consistency argument



People of fairly normal desires who are consistent
won't hold that these are normally permissible:

- Stealing, lying, ...
- Heavy smoking or drinking while pregnant.
- Blinding a fetus for sadistic fun.
- Aborting a fetus.

Am I now willing
that this would
have been done
to me in the
same situation?

Summary

- Moral philosophy = reasoning about the ultimate questions of morality.
- Metaethics: “What is the nature and methodology of ethics?” → CR - SB - SN - IN - EM - PR – and the GR-Consistency approach.
- Normative ethics: “What basic norms ought we to live by?” → Consequentialism, nonconsequentialism, virtue, natural law.
- The best summary of morality is the golden rule: “Treat others as you want to be treated.”