

PHI 202 | Precept on lectures 21 and 22

Michal Masny | 19 Nov 2020

READINGS:

Thomson, J. J. (1971). A Defense of Abortion. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*.

Nagel, T. (1979). Death. In his *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge University Press.

ABORTION

(1) According to Thomson, abortion is generally permissible with two exceptions. What are these?

(2) Consider the following case. *The Conscientious Driver*: Dan is a conscientious driver and he has been taking good care of his vehicle. Unfortunately, one day the steering unit malfunctions, causing the car collide with another vehicle.

(i) Is Dan morally liable to pay compensation? Are there limits to what he is liable to pay?

(ii) What implications does this have Thomson's argument and permissibility of abortion?

(3) *Long*: Even if abortion is deemed morally impermissible in a given case, does it follow that it should also be illegal in this case?

(4) Suppose a man and a woman accidentally conceive. The woman wants to have the child but the man does not. Is the woman's preference the only thing that matters?¹

DEATH, IMMORTALITY, AND EXTINCTION

(5) What is Nagel's claim about the badness of death in a nutshell?

(6) Is it worse for someone to be killed than to die from natural causes, other things equal? Which theories of well-being could account for the claim that it is?

(7) *Sean*: "Imagine a world in which humans are all granted immunity and will never die. Wouldn't our experiences eventually become so routine that they couldn't even be considered experiences anymore? I'm inclined to believe that we value our ability to experience because we know that death will bring an end to our experiences. I would imagine that the extended repetition of the same experiences over and over again, in a life that has no end, would eventually deflate the value of being able to experience at all and make everlasting life no better than death."²

(8) Consider

Infertility: The human species has become infertile. Everyone currently alive will live a normal life span, but there will be nobody who comes after us.

How would you react to the following scenario? What does it tell us about the badness of human extinction?³

¹ Further reading: <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/12/is-forced-fatherhood-fair/>

² Further reading: Williams, B. (1973). The Makropulos Case: reflections on the tedium of immortality.

³ Further reading: Scheffler, S. (2018). *Why Worry About Future Generations?*. Oxford University Press.