

PHI 202 | Study questions 10

Michal Masny | 11 December 2019

Readings:

Velleman, D. (1999). A right to self-termination? *Ethics*.

Thomson, J. J. (1971). A defense of abortion. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*.

(1) David Velleman's arguments against suicide are based on the following claim: in committing suicide to avoid pain, one is exchanging something of higher/unconditional value (dignity/personhood) for something of lower/conditional value (well-being).

- (i) Can you think of circumstances in which one's dignity is already lost or about to be lost?
- (ii) Are there are other kinds of actions that Kantians would object to on the same grounds?

(2) Suppose we grant, as Thomson does, that the fetus is a person.

- (i) What would a Velleman-style Kantian objection to abortion look like?
- (ii) What would Kantians say about cases in which the mother's life or health are at stake?

(3) In the lecture, we discussed *The Responsibility Objection* and considered 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 on what he is liable to pay or sacrifice?
- (ii) Does this objection succeed in showing that parents are responsible for the child's dependency on them and that the child has the right to the use of their bodies?

(4) In the lecture, we discussed *The Special Relations Objection* and considered the following case:

The Unwilling Father: Frank really does not want to be a father. He has been using contraception but his partner got pregnant anyway. Frank tried to convince her to have an abortion or to give up the child for adoption. But the woman elected to keep the child.

- (i) Does Frank have parental responsibility for the child?
- (ii) Does a sperm donor have parental responsibility for their offspring? What makes someone parentally responsible for their offspring?
- (iii) Are there limits on what parents are morally required to sacrifice for their offspring's sake in virtue of their parental responsibilities?

(5) What makes something a person, i.e. a member of the moral community? Is the capacity for rational thought, the capacity to feel pain, or something else altogether?