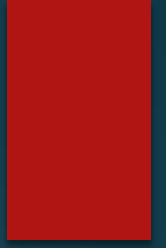




# The Personhood Argument in Favor of Abortion

MARY ANNE WARREN

What makes a being human?



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  2. Fetuses are innocent human beings.
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- ▶ Traditional argument:
  1. It is wrong to kill innocent human beings.
  2. Fetuses are innocent human beings.
  3. It is wrong to kill fetuses.
- ▶ “Human” is used differently in 1 and 2.
  - ▶ Two senses of human: moral and genetic
    - ▶ To be morally human is to be a person who is a part of the moral community.
    - ▶ To be genetically human is not necessarily to be a person.
- ▶ Noonan has no argument indicating that what is genetically human is morally a person

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- ▶ What criteria can we use to determine personhood, as distinctly separated from genetic humanity?
- ▶ Warren's criteria for personhood
  - ▶ Consciousness
  - ▶ Reasoning
  - ▶ Self-motivated activity
  - ▶ Capacity to communicate
  - ▶ Presence of self-awareness
- ▶ Any being that does not meet any of these criteria is not a person.
  - ▶ There may exist human beings that are not people (ex. someone who is no longer conscious).

# What makes a being human?

- ▶ How would a space traveler decide whether an alien is a person with moral rights or a substance to be eaten?

# How far along does a human need to be to have the right to life?

- ▶ A fetus is genetically human, but is it a person?



# How far along does a human need to be to have the right to life?

- ▶ A fetus is genetically human, but is it a person?
- ▶ Third trimester fetuses, though more personlike than smaller embryos, are not fully conscious, cannot reason, cannot communicate messages, do not engage in self-motivated activity, and have no self-awareness.
- ▶ Thus, a fetus, even in the third trimester, is less personlike than the average mammal.
  - ▶ The rights of a fish will never outweigh those of a woman—shouldn't the same apply to fetuses?

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# Potential Personhood

- ▶ Fetuses aren't people. Still, they're likely to become people if allowed to develop.
  - ▶ Does this mean they should be given the right to live?
- ▶ “Surely, if every speck of dust were a potential person, we would be much less apt to conclude that every potential person has a right to become actual” (Warren).
- ▶ Potential people have some right to life—but the rights of existing people always take precedence over the rights of potential people.

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# Potential Personhood

- ▶ A man enters an alien culture where it's decided that his body will be split into parts, each to become its own person. Does he have the right to escape?
  - ▶ His escape would deprive potential people of their lives—but he's an existing person, so his right to live outweighs theirs.
- ▶ He would have the right to escape even if...
  - ▶ It would only cost a portion of his life
  - ▶ He'd ended up in this situation as a result of his own carelessness
  - ▶ He'd ended up in this situation intentionally

# Personhood and Abortion

- ▶ A human must meet the criteria for personhood in order to be a part of our moral community (and thus receive moral rights).
- ▶ No matter its stage, a fetus does not meet these criteria. It cannot be considered a person.
- ▶ Its right to life never takes precedence over an existing person's rights.
- ▶ According to Warren, no type of abortion is immoral.