

# A Defense Of Abortion Judith Jarvis Thomson Philosophy And

A Defense Of Abortion Judith Jarvis Thomson Philosophy And a defense of abortion judith jarvis thomson philosophy and a comprehensive exploration of Judith Jarvis Thomson's influential philosophical arguments provides a nuanced perspective on the morality of abortion. Her work, particularly her famous essay "A Defense of Abortion," has significantly shaped ethical debates surrounding reproductive rights. By analyzing her thought experiments, core principles, and the implications of her reasoning, this article aims to present a thorough understanding of her position and its relevance in contemporary discussions about abortion rights.

Introduction to Judith Jarvis Thomson's Philosophy on Abortion Judith Jarvis Thomson was a renowned American philosopher whose work focused on moral philosophy, particularly bioethics and the ethics of abortion. Her 1971 essay, "A Defense of Abortion," challenges common anti-abortion arguments by proposing hypothetical scenarios that examine the moral permissibility of abortion even when the fetus is considered a person with full moral rights. Thomson's approach is notable for shifting the debate from the question of whether a fetus has a right to life to whether that right outweighs a pregnant woman's rights over her body. Her arguments are designed to show that even if one grants that the fetus has a right to life, abortion can still be morally permissible under certain circumstances.

Core Concepts in Judith Jarvis Thomson's Argument The Violinist Analogy One of Thomson's most famous thought experiments involves imagining oneself as a person who wakes up connected to a famous violinist. The violinist has a life-threatening kidney ailment, and the only way to save him is to stay connected to him for nine months. The question posed is: Are you morally obligated to remain connected? Key points of the analogy: – It illustrates the idea that even if the fetus has a right to life, it doesn't necessarily entail a right to use the pregnant woman's body without her consent. – It emphasizes bodily autonomy as a crucial moral consideration. – It suggests that an individual can have a right to life but not the right to use another person's body against their will. The Famous Violinist Scenario and Its Implications Thomson's violinist analogy is used to argue that: – If you do not consent to being connected—i.e., if you do not volunteer to carry the fetus—you are not morally required to remain connected, even if the violinist's life depends on it. – This

analogy underscores the importance of bodily autonomy in moral reasoning about abortion. Other Key Thought Experiments Thomson also considers scenarios such as: – The "People Seeds" Analogy: Similar to the "home intrusion" scenario, where tiny seeds drift into a house and take root, representing unintentional pregnancy. – The "Henry Fonda" Example: Showing that certain acts (e.g., using your body to help another survive) require explicit consent. – The "Right to Life" vs. "Right to Use" Distinction: Exploring the difference between having a right to life and having the right to use someone else's body to sustain that life.

Thomson's Key Points in Defense of Abortion To understand her philosophical stance, it's essential to examine her main arguments:

1. The Right to Life Does Not Oblige Others to Sustain It – Having a right to life does not mean others are morally obligated to sustain that life at their own expense. – The fetus's right to life does not override a woman's right to control her body.
2. Bodily Autonomy Is Fundamental – A person's right to control their own body is a vital moral principle. – Forcing a woman to carry a pregnancy against her will violates her bodily autonomy.
3. The Permissibility of Abortion in Many Circumstances – Thomson argues that in cases of rape, danger to the mother, or if the fetus is non-viable, abortion is morally permissible. – Her analogies demonstrate that even in cases where the fetus has full moral rights, these rights do not always trump the pregnant woman's rights.
4. The "Permissible but Not Obligatory" Nature of Abortion – Thomson emphasizes that abortion can be morally permissible without being obligatory, giving pregnant women moral latitude in making decisions.

Implications of Thomson's Philosophy for Contemporary Abortion Debates

### 3 Reframing the Moral Question

Thomson's work shifts the focus from whether the fetus has a right to life to the question of whether that right outweighs the woman's right to bodily autonomy. This reframing:

- Challenges anti-abortion arguments based solely on fetal rights.
- Highlights the importance of consent and bodily integrity.

Legal and Ethical Ramifications Her arguments support the stance that:

- Women should have the legal right to choose abortion, especially in cases of rape, incest, or threat to health.
- Moral permissibility does not necessarily mean mandatory action but recognizes moral complexity and individual autonomy.

Addressing Common Objections Some common objections to Thomson's position include:

- The claim that her analogies trivialize the fetus's rights.
- The concern that her arguments could justify abortion in all cases, including late-term abortions.

Thomson responds by clarifying that her analogies are meant to illustrate moral principles, not to endorse unrestricted abortion.

Criticisms and Limitations of Thomson's Philosophy While highly influential, her arguments are not without criticism:

- Some argue that her analogies are too hypothetical and fail to

capture the emotional and moral gravity of real pregnancies. – Others believe that her emphasis on bodily autonomy neglects the moral significance of fetal life. – Critics also question whether her reasoning can justify late-term abortions or cases where the fetus is viable. Counterpoints include: – The importance of context and circumstances in moral decision-making. – The recognition that rights are often balanced against each other, and no right is absolute. Conclusion: The Significance of Judith Jarvis Thomson's Defense of Abortion Judith Jarvis Thomson's philosophy offers a compelling, nuanced framework for understanding abortion rights. Her emphasis on bodily autonomy and her innovative use of thought experiments have provided powerful arguments for the moral permissibility of abortion even when fetal rights are acknowledged. While her views continue to inspire debate and critique, her work remains a cornerstone in the philosophy of reproductive ethics. Summary of key points: – Bodily autonomy is central to moral reasoning about abortion. – The fetus's right to life does not automatically outweigh a woman's rights. – Thought experiments demonstrate that moral permissibility depends on context and individual circumstances. – Her philosophy supports the legal and moral case for allowing 4 women to make autonomous reproductive choices. By engaging critically with Thomson's arguments, individuals and policymakers can better understand the ethical complexities surrounding abortion and recognize the importance of respecting women's rights and autonomy in reproductive decisions. Keywords for SEO optimization: – Judith Jarvis Thomson philosophy – defense of abortion – abortion ethics – bodily autonomy – abortion rights arguments – thought experiments in abortion debate – moral permissibility of abortion – fetal rights vs. women's rights – abortion philosophy – ethical debates on abortion This comprehensive overview aims to serve as an authoritative resource for those seeking a deep understanding of Judith Jarvis Thomson's philosophical defense of abortion and its significance in contemporary ethical discourse. Question Answer What is Judith Jarvis Thomson's main argument in her defense of abortion? Thomson argues that even if we grant the fetus has a right to life, this does not automatically outweigh a woman's right to control her body, using thought experiments like the famous violinist scenario to justify abortion in certain circumstances. How does Thomson's violinist analogy support her pro-choice stance? The violinist analogy illustrates that being morally obligated to sustain another's life does not mean one must remain connected if it drastically infringes on one's rights, emphasizing a woman's right to disconnect from pregnancy even if it results in fetal death. What distinction does Thomson make between different cases of abortion? Thomson distinguishes between cases such as rape, where abortion is seen as a justified right, and

cases of consensual sex, where the moral obligation to carry a pregnancy may be less clear, but her overall argument emphasizes women's rights over their bodies. Does Thomson believe that all abortions are morally permissible? No, Thomson argues that not all abortions are morally permissible—she acknowledges that in some cases, especially where the fetus's rights outweigh the woman's, abortion might be unjustified—but she emphasizes the importance of women's rights in most circumstances. How does Thomson respond to the view that abortion is equivalent to murder? Thomson challenges this view by arguing that the right to life does not include the right to use another person's body without consent, and she provides scenarios where abortion does not constitute unjust killing. What role do moral and legal considerations play in Thomson's philosophy of abortion? Thomson's approach emphasizes moral rights and bodily autonomy over legal restrictions, advocating for a nuanced understanding that recognizes individual rights and moral obligations rather than strict legal prohibitions. How does Thomson address the potential moral obligations of a woman to carry a pregnancy to term? Thomson suggests that while there may be moral considerations, a woman's right to her own body generally takes precedence, especially in cases of unwanted pregnancy, making her morally justified in choosing abortion. 5 In what way does Thomson's philosophy challenge anti-abortion arguments? Thomson challenges anti-abortion arguments by emphasizing bodily rights and autonomy, arguing that even if the fetus has a right to life, it does not override the woman's right to control her body, thus undermining claims that abortion is morally equivalent to murder. What are some criticisms of Thomson's defense of abortion? Critics argue that her thought experiments oversimplify complex moral issues, and some believe her emphasis on considerations related to the fetus's interests, leading to debates about the balance between rights. Why is Judith Jarvis Thomson's philosophy considered influential in debates about abortion? Her use of thought experiments and focus on bodily rights provide a nuanced framework that shifts the discussion from legality to moral rights, influencing both philosophical debates and public policy discussions on abortion. A Defense of Abortion: Judith Jarvis Thomson's Philosophy Abortion remains one of the most contentious ethical issues in contemporary society, stirring debates rooted in morality, rights, and human value. Among the influential philosophers contributing to this discourse, Judith Jarvis Thomson stands out for her nuanced and compelling defense of the permissibility of abortion, even in cases where the fetus is considered a person with rights. Her philosophical approach challenges simplistic pro-life arguments and offers a sophisticated framework for understanding women's autonomy and

moral responsibility. This article provides a comprehensive exploration of Thomson's philosophy, examining her key arguments, their implications, and the strengths and limitations of her position. Introduction to Judith Jarvis Thomson's Philosophy on Abortion Judith Jarvis Thomson's essay, "A Defense of Abortion," published in 1971, revolutionized the debate by shifting focus from whether fetuses are persons to whether women have a moral obligation to sustain fetal life. Instead of outright denying the moral status of the fetus, Thomson emphasizes the importance of individual rights—particularly the woman's right to control her body. Her approach is characterized by thought experiments, most famously the "Violinist Analogy," which illustrates that even if the fetus has a right to life, this does not necessarily trump the pregnant woman's rights. This philosophical stance has sparked widespread discussion because it introduces a moral nuance: the distinction between having a right to life and having the right to use someone else's body to sustain that life. Thomson's argument is not an outright endorsement of abortion in all circumstances but a robust defense of its moral permissibility under many conditions, emphasizing respect for women's bodily autonomy. Core Concepts in Thomson's Philosophy A Defense Of Abortion Judith Jarvis Thomson Philosophy And 6 The Right to Life Versus the Right to Decide A fundamental aspect of Thomson's philosophy is the differentiation between the fetus's right to life and the woman's right to control her body. She argues that possessing a right to life does not automatically entail the right to use another person's body without consent. This distinction underpins her entire argument: even if the fetus has a right to life, it does not have the right to impose itself on the pregnant woman, especially if doing so violates her rights. Key points: – Rights are not absolute; they can conflict. – The right to life does not override a woman's right to decide what happens to her body. – Moral permissibility of abortion hinges on whether the woman's rights are violated. The Violinist Analogy Thomson's most famous thought experiment involves an unconscious violinist who is attached to a person's kidneys against his will to sustain his life. The analogy demonstrates that even if one accepts that the violinist has a right to life, it does not morally obligate one to remain connected and sustain him, especially if doing so involves significant harm or invasion of bodily autonomy. Features: – The violinist represents a fetus with a right to life. – The person represents the pregnant woman. – The analogy emphasizes the moral difference between killing and allowing to die, and the importance of bodily autonomy. Implications: – It is permissible to unplug from the violinist, just as it can be morally acceptable to abort. – The analogy helps clarify that not all cases of abortion are morally equivalent to murder. Applying Thomson's Philosophy to Various Abortion Scenarios Thomson's

arguments are versatile and can be applied to many real-world situations, providing a framework for evaluating the morality of abortion beyond simplistic binary choices.

**Early-Stage Pregnancies** In cases where pregnancy is early, Thomson argues that women are generally morally permitted to have an abortion because their bodily autonomy remains paramount. The fetus's potential for life does not automatically outweigh the woman's right to control her body.

**Pros:**

- Recognizes women's autonomy.
- Considers the fetus's potential but does not prioritize it over existing rights.
- Aligns with common societal intuitions about early pregnancy.

**Cons:**

- Some may argue that even early-stage fetuses have a right to life.
- Ethical tensions may arise if one believes life begins at conception.

**A Defense Of Abortion Judith Jarvis Thomson Philosophy And 7 Cases of Rape and Incest** Thomson strongly supports abortion rights in cases of rape, emphasizing that no one should be forced to sustain a pregnancy resulting from violence or coercion.

**Pros:**

- Upholds respect for women's autonomy and bodily integrity.
- Recognizes the trauma involved in such pregnancies.
- Ethical consistency with the rights-based framework.

**Cons:**

- Some argue that the fetus's rights should still be considered.
- Potential societal debates about moral responsibility.

**Threats to the Mother's Life** Thomson concedes that in situations where pregnancy endangers the woman's life or causes severe health risks, abortion is morally permissible and often obligatory.

**Pros:**

- Respects the woman's right to life and health.
- Recognizes the importance of protecting existing persons' well-being.

**Cons:**

- Disagreements may arise regarding what constitutes a "severe" threat.
- Some may argue this involves moral obligations beyond rights.

**Strengths of Thomson's Philosophy** Thomson's approach offers several compelling features that strengthen her position:

- **Nuanced moral analysis:** Moves beyond black-and-white debates, acknowledging conflicts between rights.
- **Focus on bodily autonomy:** Emphasizes the central importance of a woman's control over her body.
- **Thought experiments:** Use of vivid analogies to clarify complex moral issues.
- **Inclusivity:** Addresses a broad range of scenarios, including rape, health risks, and early pregnancy.

**Key features summarized:**

Feature	Explanation
Rights-based framework	Prioritizes individual rights over the fetus's moral status alone
Flexibility	Accepts that morality depends on context and specific circumstances
Moral permissibility	Supports abortion when it does not violate the woman's rights

**Limitations and Criticisms of Thomson's Philosophy** Despite its strengths, Thomson's philosophy faces several criticisms and limitations:

- **Fetal moral status debate:** Critics argue that her approach downplays or dismisses the moral significance of the fetus's potential rights.
- **Conceptions of rights:** Some maintain that rights are not always in conflict; thus, her emphasis on

conflicts might oversimplify moral considerations. – Potential for moral relativism: The context-dependent nature of her arguments might be viewed as undermining universal moral principles. – Cultural and religious objections: Certain belief systems hold that all human life is sacred from conception, which conflicts with Thomson's permissibility stance. Pros of her approach: – Respects women's autonomy and moral agency. – Provides a pragmatic framework for complex moral decisions. – Encourages moral pluralism and dialogue. Cons: – Might be A Defense Of Abortion Judith Jarvis Thomson Philosophy And 8 seen as insufficiently respectful of the fetus's moral worth. – Could be criticized for allowing abortion even when the fetus is considered a person with rights. Conclusion: The Significance of Thomson's Philosophy in the Abortion Debate Judith Jarvis Thomson's philosophy provides a nuanced, rights-based framework that defends the moral permissibility of abortion in a wide array of circumstances. By emphasizing bodily autonomy, the distinction between having a right to life and the right to use another's body, and employing powerful thought experiments, she offers a compelling counterpoint to pro-life arguments that focus solely on fetal moral status. Her approach invites a more sophisticated understanding of moral conflicts, recognizing that rights can compete and that moral permissibility often depends on context. While her philosophy is not without critics—particularly from those who emphasize the moral significance of the fetus's potential or intrinsic value—it remains a foundational contribution that broadens the moral landscape of abortion ethics. Her work encourages ongoing dialogue, emphasizing respect, autonomy, and nuanced moral reasoning. In the ongoing debate over reproductive rights, Thomson's philosophy continues to serve as a vital voice advocating for women's moral and bodily autonomy, making her arguments essential reading for anyone seeking a thoughtful, balanced understanding of abortion ethics. abortion ethics, moral philosophy, Judith Jarvis Thomson, fetal rights, bodily autonomy, moral permissibility, thought experiments, moral dilemmas, pro-choice arguments, ethical analysis

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seminar paper from the year 2018 in the subject ethics grade 1 0 university of frankfurt main course biomedical ethics language english abstract one of the main issues that the second wave feminists addressed was the right of women to decide if and when they want to have children women in the sixties and seventies protested for their reproductive rights and demanded the legal access to abortion with slogans like my body my choice although many countries liberalized their laws concerning abortion the debate about the moral permissibility still remains one of the most heated debates across different societies judith jarvis thomson s essay a defense of abortion was published in 1971 and has had a great impact on the philosophical debate on abortion and its moral permissibility moral philosophers who are pro or anti choice alike have argued about the argumentative strategy that is best to support one s claims concerning abortion thomson s essay has been critiqued for various different reasons and this papers goal is to work out how thomson s position could be rethought after over forty years of its first publishing my main thesis is virtually the same as thomson s abortion is not always impermissible however i disagree with her



methodology and i argue that the details of different cases and the societal context they happen in ought to decide whether abortion is morally permissible or not my critique is especially aimed at thomson s strategy to assume for the sake of the argument that the fetus is a person her conception of bodily autonomy and her terminology in the first part of the paper i summarize thomson s position while focusing on the most important aspects for the following critique in the second part i mainly use the theories of gina schouten and rosalind hursthouse to criticize some of thomson s assumptions gina schouten has argued from a feminist perspective for considering that there is a societal moral obligation for caring and protecting the most vulnerable which means that depending on the moral status of fetus there is an obligation to care for them another interesting critique can be made by questioning of the role that bodily autonomy plays in bioethics and how thomson uses it to justify abortion rosalind hursthouse has attacked thomson s violinist example for being too different from an actual pregnancy and found her terminology too imprecise

judith jarvis thomson s normativity is a study of normative thought she brings out that normative thought is not restricted to moral thought normative judgments divide into two sub kinds the evaluative and the directive but the sub kinds are larger than is commonly appreciated evaluative judgments include the judgments that such and such is a good umbrella that alfred is a witty comedian and that bert answered carol s question correctly as well as the judgment that david is a good human being directive judgments include the judgment that a toaster should toast evenly that edward ought to get a haircut and that frances must move her rook as well as the judgment that george ought to be kind to his little brother thomson describes how judgments of these two sub kinds interconnect and what makes them true when they are true given the extensiveness of the two sub kinds of normative judgment our everyday thinking is rich in normativity and moreover there is no gap between normative and factual thought the widespread suspicion of the normative is therefore in large measure due to nothing deeper than an excessively narrow conception of what counts as a normative judgment

judith jarvis thomson s a defense of abortion is a cornerstone of modern moral philosophy widely taught fiercely debated and endlessly cited

thomson provides a systematic theory of human and social rights elucidating what in general makes an attribution of a right true this is a major effort to provide a stable foundation for the deeply held belief that we are not mere cogs in a communal machine but are instead individuals whose private interests are entitled to respect

contributors steven m cahn james w nickel j l cowan paul w taylor michael d bayles william a nunn iii alan h goldman paul woodruff robert a shiver judith jarvis thomson robert simon george sher robert amdur robert k fullinwider bernard r boxhill lisa h newton anita l allen celia wolf devine sidney hook richaed waaserstrom thomas e hill jr john kekes

a diverse collection of essays which reflect the breadth of judith jarvis thomson s philosophical work the diversity of topics discussed in this book reflects the breadth of judith jarvis thomson s philosophical work throughout her long career at mit thomson s straightforward approach and emphasis on problem solving have shaped philosophy in significant ways some of the book s contributions discuss specific moral and political issues such as abortion self defense the rights and obligations of prospective fathers and political campaign finance other contributions concern the foundations of moral theory focusing on hedonism virtue ethics the nature of nonconsequentialism and the objectivity of moral claims finally contributions in metaphysics and epistemology discuss the existence of sets the structures reflected in conditional statements and the commitments of testimony contributors jonathan bennett richard l cartwright joshua cohen n ann davis catherine z elgin gilbert harman barbara herman frances myrna kamm claudia mills t m scanlon ernest sosa

essay from the year 2017 in the subject philosophy practical ethics aesthetics culture nature right grade 4 0 indiana university college of arts and sciences philosophy department course phil p300 philosophical writing methods language english abstract this essay serves as an analysis and critique of the ideas propounded by judith thomson in her seminal 1970 essay people and their bodies the essay begins with an overview of the central arguments and philosophical methods thomson employs and proceed to explain several weaknesses both in the philosophical approach and the logical structure of her argumentation

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these essays with one exception originally published in philosophy public affairs consider the moral problems associated with improving the social and economic position of disadvantaged groups if the situation of women and minorities improves so that their opportunities are equal to those of more favored groups will they then be in a competitive position conducive to equal achievement if not can preferential hiring or preferential admission to educational institutions be justified the contributors explore the complexities of this problem from several points of view the discussions in part i are more theoretical and concentrate on the application to this case of general considerations from ethical theory the discussions in part ii also take up theoretical questions but they start from specific problems about the constitutionality and the effectiveness of certain methods of achieving equality and counteracting discrimination the two groups of essays demonstrate admirably the close connection between moral philosophy and questions of law and policy the issues discussed include compensation liability victimization the significance of group membership the intrinsic importance of racial sexual or meritocratic criteria and the overall effects of preferential policies

moral theory should be simple the moral theorist attends to ordinary human action to explain what makes some acts right and others wrong and we need no microscope to observe a human act yet no moral theory that is simple captures all of the morally relevant facts in a set of vivid examples stories and cases judith thomson shows just how wide an array of moral considerations bears on all but the simplest of problems she is a philosophical analyst of the highest caliber who can tease a multitude of implications out of the story of a mere bit of eavesdropping she is also a master teller of tales which have a philosophical bite beyond these pleasures however she brings new depth of understanding to some of the most pressing moral issues of the moment notably abortion thomson s essays determinedly confront the most difficult questions what is it to have a moral right to life or any other right what is the relation between the infringement of such rights and restitution how is rights theory to deal with the imposition of risk

how should we live what do we owe to other people in goodness and advice the eminent philosopher judith jarvis thomson explores how we should go about answering such fundamental questions in doing so she makes major advances in moral

philosophy pointing to some deep problems for influential moral theories and describing the structure of a new and much more promising theory thomson begins by lamenting the prevalence of the idea that there is an unbridgeable gap between fact and value that to say something is good for example is not to state a fact but to do something more like expressing an attitude or feeling she sets out to challenge this view first by assessing the apparently powerful claims of consequentialism thomson makes the striking argument that this familiar theory must ultimately fail because its basic requirement that people should act to bring about the most good is meaningless it rests on an incoherent conception of goodness and supplies not mistaken advice but no advice at all thomson then outlines the theory that she thinks we should opt for instead this theory says that no acts are simply good an act can at most be good in one or another way as for example good for smith or for jones what we ought to do is most importantly to avoid injustice and whether an act is unjust is a function both of the rights of those affected including the agent and of how good or bad the act is for them the book which originated in the tanner lectures that thomson delivered at princeton university s center for human values in 1999 includes two chapters by thomson goodness and advice provocative comments by four prominent scholars martha nussbaum jerome schneewind philip fisher and barbara herrnstein smith and replies by thomson to those comments

a diverse collection of essays which reflect the breadth of judith jarvis thomson s philosophical work

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