

Noonan

“An Almost Absolute Value in History”

Noonan

- Strategy: to advance an objective standard for determining moral status of the fetus
 - That standard is that fetuses are genetic human beings and are conceived by human parents
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 - Noonan advances the Genetically-Human Argument

Christian Criterion

- “If one steps outside the specific categories used by the theologians, the answer they gave can be analyzed as a refusal to discriminate among human beings on the basis of their varying potentialities. Once conceived, the being was recognized as man because he had man’s potential.”
- Christian criterion: “If you were conceived by human parents, you are human.”
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- Professed advantage is the refusal to discriminate among human beings

Strength of the Christian Criterion

- Noonan thinks that the strength of the Christian Criterion can be determined by examining other criteria for determining humanity
- These other criteria are:
 - Viability
 - Experience
 - Sentiment of Adults
 - Sensation by the Parents
 - Social Visibility

Viability

- Viability: As long as the fetus cannot live independently of the mother, it is not human
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- Noonan's problem with this criterion:
 - considerable elasticity to idea of viability
 - if viability is norm, then standard would vary with race and individuals
 - dependence not ended by viability-newborn is still dependent

Experience

- Experience: a person who has lived, experienced life, suffered, loved, etc. is more human than one who hasn't
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- Noonan's problem with this criterion:
 - distinction doesn't apply to embryo already "experiencing"
 - old fetuses and young children lack experience
 - why does "experience" (not other more specific things) confer humanity?

Sentiment of Adults

- Sentiment of adults: parents don't think of the early fetus as having a personality; at this point, it's an "it"
- Noonan's problem with this criterion:
 - feeling an unsure guide to humanity of others; some people have no feelings for the humanity of others of different religions, races, genders, etc.
 - feelings vary with the potentialities lost; it was only a potential human, not a real human

Sensation by Parents

- Sensation by parents: the fetus is thought to be human only after it is felt or seen
- Noonan's problem with this criterion:
 - sight more untrustworthy than feeling (racial discrimination based on perceived differences in skin color)
 - being "out of touch" does not entail loss of humanity

Social Visibility

- Social visibility: in order to be perceived as human, one has to be a member of society
- Noonan's problem with this criterion:
 - "if humanity depends on social recognition, individuals or whole groups may be dehumanized by being denied status in their society"
 - limits to humanity to exclude some group might lead to other exclusions determined by the social authority (slippery-slope argument)

Noonan's Genetic-Human Argument

1. At conception, the new being receives human genetic code.
 2. Genetic code is the biological carrier of the possibility of human wisdom.
 3. Human wisdom makes the new being a self-evolving being.
 - 4) A self-evolving being is man.
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- 5) Thus, a being with human genetic code is man.

Exceptions to the Abortion Prohibition

- Do the mother's rights outweigh the rights of the fetus?
 - NO
 - fetus is a human and to be treated as a neighbor; thus, fetus's rights equal to the mother's
- Is abortion permissible in cases of self-defense?
 - YES, but rare
- According to Noonan, abortion is almost always immoral

Marquis' Criticisms of Noonan

1. The premise that whatever is biologically human has a right to life has scope problems because the class of the biological human includes too much. (e.g., human cancer cell cultures are biologically human but don't have a right to life)
2. If "human" category a moral category, then one cannot show that the fetus is fully human with full moral rights without begging the question
 - Moral relevance problems: the connection between the biological and the moral is assumed, but this is the very connection that needs to be proven
 - Noonan fails to clearly distinguish between being biologically human and being a moral being (having personhood)