

Selective Termination of Pregnancy

Ms. Q is a thirty-year-old woman who is pregnant for the first time, having spent several years in a local infertility program. She had been treated previously with clomiphene citrate, a fertility drug that increases the incidence of multiple births among those who subsequently become pregnant from one percent to eight percent. Dr. G., the physician who prescribed the drug, had indicated to the patient that its use involved “some risk of multiple gestation.”

At nine weeks gestation, ultrasound reveals the presence of triplets. After discussion with her husband, Ms. Q asks Dr. G to terminate two of the fetuses. She says she really wants to have a child and “be a good mother,” but doesn’t feel capable of caring for more than one child at a time. Even though all three fetuses appear healthy, her preference is to abort all rather than have triplets.

A technique similar to amniocentesis (in which the uterine cavity is entered) has been used to terminate selectively a defective fetus, when a serious fetal anomaly, such as Down syndrome, occurs in a multiple gestation. This technique could be used to terminate two of the triplets, but it entails an incremental risk of miscarriage. Legally, Dr. G. could: (1) terminate the pregnancy through a standard method of abortion; (2) selectively terminate the gestation of two of the triplets; (3) refuse to terminate the pregnancy, with transfer of care to a physician who is willing to do so.

Is it morally permissible for Ms. Q to selectively terminate her pregnancy (option 2)? Consider this case in light of Thomson’s arguments. Given that Thomson assumes fetuses have moral status and a right to life, would Thomson say Ms. Q’s rights outweigh the rights of the fetus? Since Thomson thinks that the circumstances in which a woman becomes pregnant are important in weighing the responsibilities and rights of the mother and rights of the fetus, how might Thomson argue given the circumstances of this case? When discussing this case, be sure to consider Thomson’s analogies and how they might/might not apply to this case and to the argument you want to make. Please note that the assignment is to consider only option 2.

Selective Termination of Pregnancy

DUE: Wednesday, November 17, 2010. Submit all papers in either .doc/.docx or .rtf format into the D2L Dropbox created for this paper by the beginning of class, 10:30a.

FORMAT: Paper Guidelines: (i) 3-4 pages, absolutely no more than four pages; (ii) double-spaced, pages numbered with one-inch margins, Times font, 12 point; (iii) cover page with name, date, title--do not place name or other identifying marks anywhere else on the paper; (iv) stapled, no binders or loose sheets.

IMPORTANT: Failure to include a cover page or to place your name anywhere else on the paper but the cover page will result in a penalty assessed on the paper.

ELEMENTS: Your paper should contain the following elements:

- i) Thesis: A very brief sentence or two stating your position on the issue. It should be clear from this thesis what position you will be arguing and why you are arguing what you are.
- ii) Clearly and briefly summarize the case.
- iii) Clearly and explicitly state your argument. What are the reasons one should be persuaded to accept your argument? If you depend on one of Thomson's analogies, then very clearly explain that argument, how it applies to the case, and how it fits with your thesis.
- iv) Consider a counter-argument: How might someone who does not agree with your argument respond to your analysis?
- v) Respond to the counter-argument: Show why the counter-argument does not defeat your original position. Failure to provide a response to a counter-argument makes it look like you have no reply and that your argument is defeated.
- vi) Brief conclusion: In no more than a sentence or two, sum up your paper. This usually involves a restatement of your thesis statement in light of what you have just argued.

For more writing tips, see the downloadable document "Writing Tips" on the Notes and Handouts page. Also, there are links to resources about writing philosophy papers on the Resources page.

Ethics, Fall 2010

From *Cases in Bioethics*, Bette-Jane Crigger, ed., (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).