

Reading Questions for February 13

These questions cover an article by Judith Jarvis Thomson called “A Defense of Abortion.” The answers do not have to be turned in. You will probably have to read more than once to get the answers.

*Background:*

This week we are discussing abortion. On Monday and Wednesday we’ll look at a couple of people arguing in favor of the view that abortion is morally permissible; on Friday we’ll look at someone arguing against this conclusion. In today’s article, Thomson gives an argument defending the claim that sometimes abortions are morally permissible. In the context of arguing for this, she introduces one of the most famous thought experiments of all time, which talks about a violinist.

*Questions:*

1. On the first full paragraph of page 48 (starting “I propose...”) Thomson states what is probably the most common argument against abortion. How does the argument go? What premise is she willing to grant for the sake of discussion?
2. On pages 48-9, Thomson introduces a story involving a violinist that is supposed to help her challenge one of the premises of the argument she just introduced. How does the story go? Which premise is it supposed to challenge? Is Thomson successful in challenging that premise?
3. On page 57, Thomson writes: “I suppose we may take it as a datum that in a case of pregnancy due to rape the mother has not given the unborn person a right to the use of her body for food and shelter ... But suppose a woman voluntarily indulges in intercourse, knowing of the chance it will issue in pregnancy, and then she does become pregnant; is she not in part responsible for the presence .. of the unborn person inside her?” Thomson answers the question in two paragraphs starting on page 58 with “And we should also notice ...” How does Thomson answer this question? Is what she has to say plausible?