

**philosophy 164: medical ethics**  
**jayne johnson**

**abortion**

**A set of base case assumptions:**

- both mother *and* father support the abortion
- health of mother not at risk
- not a rape case
- done in a safe, sterile environment by a trained professional
- done in first trimester (month 2 or month 3)

**A (bad) argument against abortion:**

1. All actions that kill a human being are morally wrong.
2. All abortions are actions that kill a human being.
3. Therefore, all abortions are morally wrong.

**A (better) argument against abortion:**

1. All actions that kill an innocent person without resulting in saving the life of another person or something of similar moral importance are morally wrong.
2. Most abortions are actions that kill an innocent person without resulting in saving the life of another person or something of similar moral importance.
3. Therefore, most abortions are morally wrong.

**Q1: Are embryos people?**

A simple view: a *person* is a living human being in the biological or genetic sense

A slight modified view: a *person* is a living human being in the biological sense having a full set of chromosomes

**A view gotten from Warren's alien thought experiment:**

- (a) consciousness (experience) and sentience (feeling)
- (b) the capacity to reason
- (c) the capacity for self-motivated action
- (d) the capacity to communicate
- (e) self-awareness

**Q2: Is being a *potential person* enough?**

**Thompson's Argument that many abortions are morally permissible.**

1. The moral considerations involved in the violinist case are exactly alike those involved with many abortions.
2. If the moral considerations involved in the violinist case are exactly alike those involved with many abortions, then many abortions are morally wrong if and only if it would morally wrong to detach from the violinist.
3. It would not be morally wrong to detach from the violinist.
4. Therefore, many abortions are not morally wrong.