

Things I focused on in this paper:

* Showing how analogies are meant to work

* Making connections between objections and replies explicit

* Taking the "next step" in an argument, by considering a reply that the author *could* make.

This paper is 1063 words. I wrote it a bit long to start and then pared down.

Thomson's Violinist and The Importance of Risk

Intro	<p>In her 1971 essay, "A Defense of Abortion", Judith Thomson argues that abortion is sometimes permissible even if we grant that the fetus has the right to life. I will set out her main argument and then discuss an objection from Mary Anne Warren, which says that the argument only establishes that abortion is permissible in a very narrow range of cases. I will argue that Thomson could respond to Warren by saying that whether we grant a fetus the right to the use of our body depends not only on whether we knowingly take on a risk of becoming pregnant, but also on our intentions.</p>	<p>In the intro (first paragraph), I say what I will do in the paper. That last sentence is my thesis.</p>
this is repetitive... oops!	<p>Thomson's central argument involves this thought experiment: suppose that you wake up one day in a hospital, hooked up to all sorts of machines. You have been kidnapped and connected, via all sorts of machines, to a famous unconscious violinist. Your kidneys are now filtering his blood, and if you remove yourself he will die (Thomson, p. 48-49). Thomson argues that in this case, it would be "a great kindness" to remain hooked up to the violinist (Thomson, p. 49), but you are not under a moral obligation to do so. So, it is permissible to kill the violinist, even though the violinist has the right to life.</p>	<p>These two paragraphs explain Thomson's argument. I don't give every little detail - just enough to understand the important features of the argument. I also explain <i>how</i> the analogy relates to abortion.</p>
Thomson's view	<p>Thomson's thought experiment is meant to be analogous to pregnancy, assuming (for the sake of argument) that the fetus, like the violinist, has a right to life. The fetus relies someone else to stay alive, just as the violinist relies on you in Thomson's example. Someone who has an abortion kills the fetus, just as you would kill the violinist by unhooking yourself. Thomson's argument is supposed to show that even if the fetus has a right to life, it still may be permissible to abort. Just as the violinist's right to life does not grant him the right to use your body to sustain his life, the fetus's right to life does not grant it the right to use your body. Your right to bodily integrity can outweigh the fetus's right to life, just as it outweighs the violinist's right to life.</p>	
Warren's objection	<p>Mary Anne Warren (1973, "The Moral and Legal Status of Abortion") argues against Thomson's view. She points out that it is an important feature of Thomson's analogy that you are kidnapped and hooked up to the violinist without your consent. If you had <i>agreed</i> to be hooked up to the violinist, then it would not be permissible to later unhook yourself (Warren, p. 3). This means that Thomson's violinist case is only analogous to a small portion of pregnancies: most clearly, pregnancies due to rape. Thomson herself seems to agree, suggesting that in cases where someone is clearly responsible for becoming pregnant, she has in effect "invited [the fetus] in", and abortion may not be permissible. (Thomson, p. 57)</p>	<p>These two paragraphs explain Warren's objection. I start by stating which part of Thomson's argument Warren is objecting to. I also explain Thomson a little bit more along the way. Then, I bring in Warren's new violinist case.</p>
	<p>Warren is especially interested in what Thomson's view says about cases in which someone does not <i>voluntarily</i> become pregnant, but becomes pregnant after voluntarily taking a <i>risk</i> of becoming pregnant (such as using a fallible method of birth control). To consider these cases, Warren spells out another thought experiment: suppose you enter a lottery in which you might be chosen to be hooked up to an ailing violinist. (Warren, p. 3) Now suppose your number comes up. Is it permissible to unhook yourself? According to Warren, no: taking the known risk in this case commits you to accepting the consequences, if you are chosen in the lottery, even if the lottery is very large. Therefore, if Thomson's account of the original violinist analogy is right, taking even a small risk of becoming pregnant <i>could</i> commit us to carrying a pregnancy (should it occur) to term. Warren concludes that this is implausible. She therefore rejects Thomson's reasoning.</p>	<p>Here I'm showing how Warren's violinist case relates to Thomson's view.</p>

This is "signposting": indicating where we are in the argument. Other examples include "I will argue..." "Second, let's consider..." "So far, we have seen..." and anything else that reminds us where we are in the structure of your paper.

In response to Warren's objection, Thomson might argue that the *level of risk* is not all that matters in these cases. Someone who enters a large violinist lottery might *hope* not to be chosen, but someone who is sexually active and uses a fallible birth control method is *trying not to* become pregnant. So maybe Thomson could argue that we need to look at the agent's broader intentions to determine whether she is granting the fetus the right to the use of her body.

To make this plausible, Thomson could propose yet another violinist case. Suppose that we live in a society where a Music Lovers traffic force routinely patrols the streets, and very occasionally performs traffic stops. If there is a violinist with failing kidneys, the Music Lovers will randomly select a licensed driver to be hooked up to the violinist. So getting a driver's license entails taking a risk of being stopped and hooked up. But you can pretty reliably avoid police stops by not taking certain routes and by not driving a flashy car. Driving is an important part of life in this society, and essential to most careers one could have. Not driving would limit one's options severely. So suppose that you sign up for a license, but drive a boring car and avoid routes that the Music Lovers usually frequent. Still, you are pulled over and hooked up to a violinist. Is it permissible to unhook yourself?

I think it is plausible in this case – more so than in Warren's lottery case – that it is permissible to unhook yourself. This seems to be because, although one took a risk, one *actively tried not to* be selected. This shows that Warren's analogy is missing an important feature that is present in cases of sex with birth control, even when the level of risk is the same: people who use birth control are making a concerted effort *not to* become pregnant.

I do not think that this objection is decisive. (One might still ask: how *much* effort is necessary? Does the level of risk still matter? And so on.) But it does seem like a plausible route for Thomson to take. Granting rights to others, and becoming responsible for things that happen to us, is a matter of more than just taking chances: it is more complicated than that. Adopting this line of thought could allow Thomson to say that abortion is permissible in a wider range of cases, and avoid some of the extreme results that Warren is worried about.

Bibliography

Thomson, Judith. [1971] "A Defense of Abortion". *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1):47-66.

Warren, Mary Anne. [1973] "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion". *The Monist* 57 (1):43-61.

My bibliography has all of the relevant citation information. Format doesn't matter.

Now I'm considering what Thomson might say in response. I point to an important feature that Warren's analogy is missing. Then I create my own analogy that includes that feature, to show that it makes a difference. (You do not need to do all of this, but it is one way to go.)

Here I'm summing up why my reply is relevant to Warren's objection.

In the conclusion I take stock of where we are now in the debate. Notice that I'm using the first person -- that's okay in philosophy.

Reply on behalf of Thomson

Conclusion