

The Mexico City Policy

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Thesis:

The United States government has the duty to withdraw aid from NGOs that provide abortions in developing countries.

- Central to my argument is the claim that abortion violates the negative rights of the fetus.
- To make this claim, I will need to establish that the fetus is capable of bearing negative rights.
- (Image: 7 week fetus)



- Premises:
- 1. Governments have the duty to avoid cooperation with violations of negative rights in developing countries.
- 2. The fetus is a human being.
- 3. All human beings are persons.
- 4. Every person has the right against harm.
- 5. Abortion violates the negative rights of the fetus.
- Conclusion: The United States government has the duty to withdraw aid from NGOs that provide abortions in developing countries.

- Premise 1: Governments have the duty to avoid cooperation with violations of negative rights.
- Negative rights are cosmopolitan.
- Agents: apply to all agents, including governments.
- Scope: Everyone; political association with the agent is not necessary.

- Premise 2: The fetus is a human being.
- Scientifically, the life of a new organism begins at fertilization. Human development starts at fertilization.
- The fetus is alive (metabolism, growth, response to stimuli)
- Has a complete and unique set of *human* DNA.
- Is the offspring of human parents (*principle of biogenesis*: every living thing reproduces after its own kind).

Objection 1

- There is a difference between human beings and persons. The fetus is undeniably different from other human organisms in many ways. Therefore, although they are genetically human, fetuses are not persons.

Response 1

- I will explore this objection in my next premise.

- Premise 3: All human beings are persons.
- The difference between these terms is ill-defined.
- Attempts to distinguish between these terms seem to be attempts to say that some human beings are not valuable.
- Value is not based on arbitrary characteristics, but on what something *is*.
- What is the fetus? A human at the earliest stage of development.

- (Premise 3 continued)
- Fetuses do differ from other humans, but it does not follow that they are not persons.
 - The ways fetuses differ from other humans fall into these categories:
 - 1. Size (the fetus is smaller)
 - 2. Level of development (the fetus is less developed)
 - 3. Environment (the fetus is in the womb)
 - 4. Degree of dependency (the fetus is more dependent on other people for survival)

- (Criteria: size, level of development, environment, degree of dependency).
- Also make babies, children and teenagers different from adults.
- If used to determine personhood, exclude babies, children, and teenagers from being “persons”.
- Could be used to justify killing 2-year-olds or 13-year-olds (smaller, less developed, more dependent).
- Are arbitrary: why not race, religion, or gender to determine personhood?

Objection 2

- The fetus lacks consciousness. Therefore the fetus cannot be a person.

Response 2

Using consciousness as a determinant of being a “person” renders:

- newborns
- people in reversible comas
- people who are sleeping
- people who have fainted
- as non-persons too. Is it morally permissible to destroy them?

Response 2 (cont.)

- Consciousness is an attribute of persons, but it is not what persons *are*.

- Premise 4: Every person has the right against harm.
- Negative right.
- Standard: the right to not be killed; most basic human right.
- Scope: everyone.
- Agents: everyone.
- Grounds: being human; every person is intrinsically valuable.

- Premise 4 (cont.)
- Also, negative rights are prerequisites for other rights.
- Other rights cannot apply unless negative rights are respected.
- (ex., right to an education, or to vote).

- Premise 5: Abortion violates the negative rights of the fetus.
- Abortion deliberately destroys the fetus.
- Deliberate destruction of the fetus is an offense against the fetus's right to not be killed.

- Therefore, because
- 1. Governments have the duty to avoid cooperation with violations of negative rights in developing countries,
- 2. The fetus is a human being,
- 3. All human beings are persons,
- 4. Every person has the negative right to not be killed, and
- 5. Abortion violates the negative rights of the fetus,
- Conclusion: The United States' government has the duty to withdraw funding from NGOs that provide abortions in developing countries.

Questions for Debate

- 1. Do you think abortion should be offered as a form of population control in developing countries?
- 2. We are currently in an economic crisis. Do you think the U.S. should give money to foreign NGOs that could be spent at home?
- 3. Do you think there should be fewer abortions, either in the U.S. or in developing countries? What do you think the role of government should be in abortion?

Objection 3

- If the U.S. withdraws aid from NGOs that provide abortions in developing countries, access to abortion will decrease; women's rights to enter the workforce will be violated because they will be forced to carry a child for nine months.

Response 3

- Claims of a right to enter the work force presupposes a right to life, which abortion denies the fetus. The right to work would not be possible without the right to life, so protection of the right to life takes precedence over the right to enter the workforce.

Objection 4

- Withdrawing aid for abortions will increase overpopulation in underdeveloped countries, leading to more poverty.

Response 4

- It is contested whether or not overpopulation is a real problem; some estimate
- Not obvious that dense population causes poverty.
- Some cities like Singapore are densely populated by quite affluent.
- More likely that poverty results not from too many people or a lack of resources, but from an *unfair distribution* of resources.

Response 4 (cont.)

- Enough resources: “At the global level, there is currently enough food available to feed the world's population, so the problem appears to be distribution, not scarcity.” (Worldwatch).
- Unjust distribution: “The average American consumes over 25 times more resources than the average person from a developing country” (World Population Balance).
- Funding for abortions in developing countries diverts money and attention away from efforts toward sustainability and equitable resource distribution.

Response 4 (cont.)

- Secondly, the objection assumes a growing population is a bad thing. This is not necessarily true.
- Developing countries need economic growth.
- There has never been economic growth without population growth.
- People are necessary to drive the economy, both with their labor and ideas.
- The fetus that is aborted might be the very person who will one day discover the cure for HIV or invent a better system to distribute resources equitably.

Response 4 (cont.)

- Furthermore, it is unacceptable to try to end poverty by killing those who are poor.
- Killing is never an acceptable solution to social or political problems.

Objection 5

- Even though the fetus is a person with negative rights, the fetus does not have the right to use the woman's body. Therefore, abortion is still permissible.

Response 5

- If it is in your power to save someone's life, and
- you are the only who has the power to save that person's life, and
- you can do so without sacrificing something of comparable value (your life) then
- you have the duty to do so.
- By not having an abortion, the woman does not sacrifice something of comparable value to the life of the fetus.

Objection 6

- Abortion spares the fetus from a miserable life of destitution. It can therefore be viewed as a merciful act.

Response 6

- Firstly, killing is never an acceptable solution to social or political problems.
- Secondly, we cannot see the future. We don't know for sure what life holds for ourselves or anyone else.
- For example:
 - A child was born to a single, teenage mother.
 - He was raised in a broken home.
 - He didn't have good prospects.
 - But then...

He became President.

