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### A Defense of Abortion

In her 1976 work, *A Defense of Abortion*, Judith Jarvis Thomson presents a compelling argument for the legality and morality of abortion. Through an analysis of Thomson's use of philosophical language, reasoning, and arguments, this critical analysis will explore the strengths and weaknesses of her position. The core of Thomson's argument relies on the notion that a woman has a right to self-defense against unwanted guests or intruders. She uses this concept as an analogy to explain why a pregnant woman has the right to terminate her pregnancy in certain cases. Specifically, she states that if it is true that the fetus has rights, then it cannot be wrong for the mother to defend herself from this intruder by terminating her pregnancy. Furthermore, she contends that such cases are not murder because killing an intruder is seen as morally acceptable in our society and should therefore extend to include pregnancies due to rape or other undesirable circumstances.

In her study, Thomson argues that abortion can be morally permissible even if the fetus is considered to have a right to life. She argues that this conclusion follows from two premises: first, that in some cases it can be wrong to impose on someone a burden that they did not choose or consent to; and second, that the woman who becomes pregnant has not chosen or consented to bear the baby. In support of her view, Thomson gives an example of a famous violinist who must be plugged into you for nine months due to a medical emergency and explains why it would still be wrong to force you to remain plugged in despite not having consented. She connects this

example with the situation of pregnancy by arguing that just as it is wrong to impose a burden on someone without their consent, so too it can be wrong to force a woman to bear a child that she did not choose or consent to.

Thomson also addresses potential objections to her view. She argues that even if the fetus has a right to life, this does not necessarily mean that the mother must continue with her pregnancy and give birth as this could involve an unreasonable imposition of a burden on the mother's body and life. Moreover, Thomson contends that abortion can still be morally permissible even when the fetus has reached a stage where it is potentially viable outside of the womb as long as its removal from the womb does not pose any greater risk than continuing with the pregnancy would have posed. The moral theory that could support Thomson's view is the principle of autonomy, which states that individuals should be free to make their own decisions about their lives, and no one should be made to suffer for choices they have not consented to. This principle of autonomy thus supports Thomson's claim that abortion can be morally permissible in cases where the woman has not chosen or consented to bear the child. Thus, Thomson claims that abortion can be morally permissible even when the fetus is considered to have a right to life, as long as it does not involve an unreasonable imposition of a burden on the mother.

This argument is supported by her example of a famous violinist and her appeal to the principle of autonomy. Moreover, she addresses potential objections to her view and provides responses to them. Thus, her argument is presented in its strongest form. Finally, it is important to note that Thomson's conclusion does not necessarily mean that abortion should always be permitted; rather, it suggests that in some cases where the mother has not consented to bear the child, then abortion can still be morally permissible. Therefore, Thomson acknowledges that

there are circumstances in which a woman may have voluntarily chosen or consented to become pregnant but still reasonably seek an abortion, and emphasizes that such decisions should also be respected.

One objection to Thomson's view is that it ignores the potential harms of abortion on the mother. While Thompson argues that abortion can be morally permissible if it does not impose an unreasonable burden on the mother, she fails to consider how adverse physical and mental health effects may result from having an abortion. For instance, studies have shown that women who have had abortions are more likely to suffer from depression, drug abuse, and post-traumatic stress disorder than those who do not. Furthermore, depending on the stage of pregnancy at which the procedure is performed, there may also be risks of complications such as infection or even death for the woman undergoing it.

This objection can be supported by appealing to the moral theory of utilitarianism which seeks to maximize happiness and reduce suffering which suggests that individuals should choose the action (in this case, whether or not to have an abortion) which has the greatest net benefit for all parties involved. This would mean that in cases where a woman may suffer from physical or mental health complications because of having an abortion, then it might be morally wrong to allow her to proceed with it. In such circumstances, Thompson's argument fails to provide sufficient justification for supporting the permissibility of abortion.

In conclusion, Thomson's argument in favor of abortion is morally permissible in certain cases is based on the principle of autonomy and her famous violinist example. While this view may be supported by appealing to the principle of autonomy, it fails to consider how potential harm may arise from having an abortion. As such, a utilitarian approach that seeks to maximize happiness and reduce suffering may provide a stronger justification for why abortion should not

always be allowed. Ultimately, while Thomson's argument makes a compelling case for allowing abortions in some situations, due consideration must also be given to any potential health risks involved before making any decisions.



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Works Cited

Thomson, Judith Jarvis. "A Defense of Abortion." *Biomedical Ethics and the Law*, Springer, 1976, pp. 39–54.

