

## Abortion is Seriously Ethically Wrong

### 1) Question:

Why is it seriously ethically wrong to kill one of us?

What properties do we possess in virtue of which killing one of us is wrong?

If there is a property we possess in virtue of which killing one of us is seriously ethically wrong, then, if human fetuses also possess this property, killing a human fetus would likewise be seriously ethically wrong.

### 2) A first suggestion:

It is seriously ethically wrong to kill one of us in virtue of our being persons.

—But personhood is not a property possessed by human fetuses. So if killing a human fetus is seriously ethically wrong, it cannot be in virtue of human fetuses being persons.

### 3) A second suggestion:

It is seriously ethically wrong to kill one of us in virtue of our humanity.

—Our humanity is simply our membership in the genus *Homo*. But the species to which an animal belongs is irrelevant to how, from an ethical point of view, it can and cannot be treated. The humanity of a human fetus is of no more ethical significance than our humanity, the humanity of a human adult.

### 4) A third suggestion:

It is seriously ethically wrong to kill one of us in virtue of our having a future that promises to be worth living.

The misfortune of death (for those for whom death is a misfortune) consists in death's depriving one of a future worth living.

—A human fetus typically does have a future worth living.

### 5) An argument that abortion is seriously ethically wrong

1. Abortion involves killing a human fetus.

2. A human fetus is a being whose future promises to be worth living.

Therefore: 3. Abortion involves killing a being whose future promises to be worth living.

4. It is seriously ethically wrong to kill a being whose future promises to be worth living.

Therefore: 5. Abortion is seriously ethically wrong.

6) Note:

a) This argument is silent on abortion involving fetuses whose future does not promise to be worth living (fetuses who will develop into infants lacking parts of their brains, perhaps, for instance).

b) The conclusion of this argument does not imply that having an abortion can never be an ethically sound course of action. Having an abortion can be an ethically sound thing to do so long as the goods to be gained by having an abortion (or the evils to be avoided) are of greater ethical significance than the wrong that would be committed. (Compare killing an enemy combatant when justly waging a just war.)

c) This argument does not propose that abortion is seriously ethically wrong in virtue of anything the human fetus has potentially. The fetus does not potentially possess a future like ours; it right now possesses one.

7) Comment and criticism: