

Week #9, Class 2

Is abortion morally permissible? People disagree vehemently about the answer to this question. Yet the dispute appears intractable: the arguments advanced by each side rarely (if ever) persuade anyone to change his or her mind, let alone resolve the issue.

Some possible explanations for this are:

1. **People on one side of the debate are just stupid or irrational.** For example, someone may accept the premises of a valid argument, yet refuse to believe the conclusion. Or she may fail more generally to connect some of her beliefs together (see Thomson on "Walling Off." Pp. 205).
2. **The issue is very complex and difficult.** Issues about abortion are connected to many other important issues, and it is not even clear what is relevant or not relevant to the question of its permissibility. Rational, intelligent people can disagree about complex issues simply because they are hard to understand (Thomson. Pp. 205).
3. **Some people are not as well placed as others to discover the truth because they have very different background experiences and beliefs.** "Different people with different starting points will rationally respond in different ways to the same evidence. There is no guarantee that people who start sufficiently far apart in belief will tend to converge in view as the evidence comes in" (Harman. Pp. 12).
4. **Moral relativism (something like Harman's version) is correct.**

**Debate Proposition:** 4 is the best explanation for the intractability of the dispute about abortion.