Reflection Prompts for Week 4

Monday’s Reading

Thomson’s ‘A Defense of Abortion’

In ‘A Defense of Abortion,’ Judith Jarvis Thomson is arguing for the legal and moral permissibility of abortion in some cases. However, she is also arguing for a certain conception of what it means to possess a right to life. Read the article and reflect on any of the following:

• What conclusion(s) about abortion and a right to life does Thomson draw from the ailing violinist analogy? Do you think that the violinist case is strongly analogous to abortion in the case of rape? Why or why not?

• Explain the distinction between killing versus letting die and how it is used in the abortion debate. How does Thomson use the ‘growing child/tiny house’ and ‘the coat’ analogies to challenge this distinction and its use. Again, are these strongly analogous to the abortion case? Why or why not?

• By the end of the article, what does she claim that possessing a right to life actually entails? In other words, what obligation does it impose on others? What obligations does it not impose? Briefly describe the first Henry Fonda analogy and the boys with chocolate analogy. How are these analogies intended to support her claim about the right to life? Is her use of these analogies compelling or not?

• What is the point of the burglar and people-seed examples? Do you think these are good analogies for the case of abortion in the cases of failed contraception? Why or why not?

• What does Thomson mean by a Minimally Decent Samaritan? Given this standard, what cases of abortion would be morally indecent? Is this too low of a standard? In other words, should we require that all people behave as Good Samaritans? Why or why not?

Wednesday & Friday’s Reflections:

• Reflection questions on Hotel Rwanda will be passed out in class.