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24.06J / STS.006J Bioethics
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Bioethics Session 7 Handout: Abortion

Is it morally permissible to abort a ten-week fetus when you have a clear interest, unrelated to health, in doing so? Here are the basic arguments offered by Tooley and Marquis.

Tooley's Argument: what matters is whether it *wants to live*

- P1** For any entities A, X , it is wrong to deprive A of X only if
(i) A has a right to X and (ii) A wants X .
- P2** In order to want to live, you must conceive of yourself as a thing that can persist through time.
- P3** Ten-week fetuses do not conceive of themselves as things that can persist through time.
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- C** It is not wrong to deprive a ten-week fetus of life.

Is this a good argument? What about **P1**? Do you really have to want to live in order for it to be wrong to kill you? What about suicidal teenagers? What about the comatose?

Marquis' Argument: what matters is its *potential*

- P1** It is wrong to deprive a thing of a valuable future.
- P2** By aborting a ten-week fetus, you deprive it of a valuable future.
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- C** It is wrong to abort a ten-week fetus.

Is this a good argument? What about **P1**? What about potential super-cats?