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24.06J / STS.006J Bioethics
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Second Paper Topic

Choose one of the following questions to answer. Type out the question you are answering at the top of your paper. Your paper is due in class in SES #11.

(1) Stinson and Stinson describe how their son became “hopelessly entrapped in an intensive care unit.” Why did this conflict between parents and doctors take place? Consider changes in both medical technologies and patient-doctor relationships in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the readings -- Emanuel, Rachels, Reiser, Lock, Baker, Singer & Kuhse -- can be helpful here.

(2) In Section V of “Abortion and Infanticide” Tooley makes a case against “the conservative position on abortion.” It boils down to two claims: (i) We should accept that early abortion is immoral only if we accept what he calls the “potentiality principle,” and (ii) We should not accept this “potentiality principle.” What are his arguments for (i) and (ii)? Do these arguments work? What could Marquis say in response?

(3) Reagan uses a historical analysis to make a normative argument about abortion. Reconstruct her argument. What is she arguing? What evidence does she provide? Does she successfully make the claim that past history ought to determine our current choices (i.e. is this a good argument on behalf of a woman’s right to choose to have an abortion)?

(4) Marquis argues that first trimester abortion is, in most cases, gravely *immoral*. Reagan argues that criminalization of abortion has intolerably bad consequences, and therefore abortion should be *legal*. Can these claims be reconciled? If they cannot be reconciled, which should we reject and why?

(5) Much debate about the ethics of abortion has to do with the rights of the fetus. Does the fetus have the rights of an adult human being – in particular, the right not to be killed? Thomson claims that this question is irrelevant. Even if the fetus had all the rights of an adult human being, it would still be permissible to abort it. What is her argument for this claim? She appeals to some examples to support her argument (the violinist, the people-seeds). Are these examples convincing?

General Guidelines:

Your papers should be 4-6 pages, double-spaced. Grading will be based on how well you answer the question, specifically your argument, use of evidence and readings, organization, and clarity. Give proper credit with citations whenever you use material (quoted or summarized) from readings or lectures; if you have questions about this, see the information at the MIT Writing Center website (<http://web.mit.edu/writing/>).