

PHIL 252: MAKING MORAL DECISIONS **PRELIMINARY QUIZ**

**Graded iClicker QUIZ:** Select the best single answer

1. Pope John Paul II says abortion is wrong because it says so in the Bible.

(A) True  
(B) False

PHIL 252: MAKING MORAL DECISIONS

**LECTURE 14: MORAL CONTROVERSIES: ANTI-ABORTION**

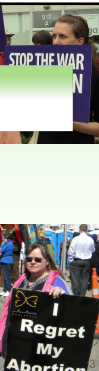
**Material today**

1. Introduction to the abortion controversy
2. John Paul II on the humanity of the fetus

**Introduction**

Q: Which do you lean towards?  
(A) "Pro-choice"  
(B) "Pro-life"

- Q: Why don't people agree about abortion?
- Common explanations:
  - people disagree about politics
  - people disagree about religion
  - men don't understand women
  - value judgments are inherently subjective
- *Possibly there are even deeper philosophic differences*




**Introduction**

- Karol Józef Wojtyła (1920–2005)
  - aka John Paul II: Roman Catholic pope (1978–2005), theologian, philosopher
  - author of *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*), encyclical about abortion and euthanasia
- Q: Which ethical theory does JP II probably endorse?
  - divine command theory (DCT), of course:
 

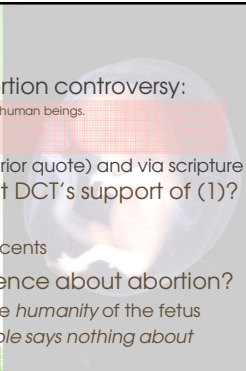
'God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can, in any circumstance, claim for himself the right to destroy directly an innocent human being. . . . ' Sacred Scripture in fact presents the precept! 'Thou shalt not kill!' as a divine commandment. . . . in the Decalogue, at the heart of the Covenant which the Lord makes with his chosen people. . . . God proclaims that he is absolute Lord of the life of man, who is formed in his image and likeness. Human life is thus given a sacred and inviolable character, which reflects the inviolability of the Creator himself.

--John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*



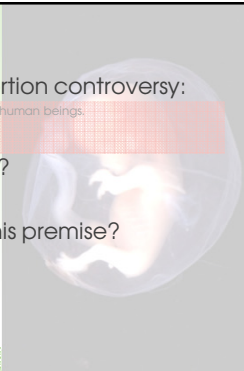
**The humanity of the fetus**

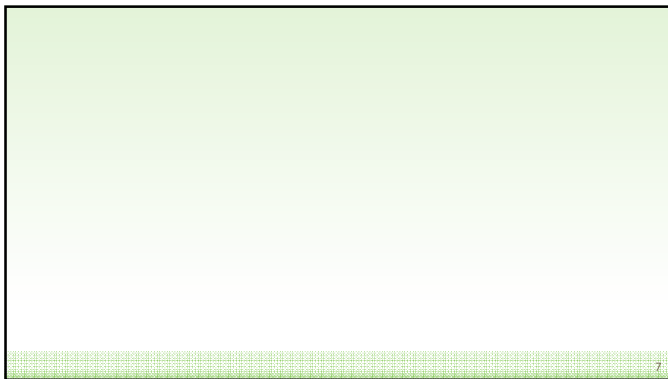
- John Paul applies DCT to the abortion controversy:
  1. DIVINE COMMAND THEORY: It is wrong to kill innocent human beings.
  2. Fetuses are innocent human beings.
  3. Therefore, it is wrong to kill fetuses.
  - DCT seems to support (1) in principle (prior quote) and via scripture
  - Q: Are there any reasons to doubt DCT's support of (1)?
    - DCT might be wrong
    - DCT might not always forbid killing innocents
  - Q: What premise permits an inference about abortion?
    - JP defends both the *innocence* and the *humanity* of the fetus
    - he thinks it has to be argued for: *the Bible says nothing about abortion*



**The humanity of the fetus**

- John Paul applies DCT to the abortion controversy:
  1. DIVINE COMMAND THEORY: It is wrong to kill innocent human beings.
  2. Fetuses are innocent human beings.
  3. Therefore, it is wrong to kill fetuses.
  - Q: Why think the fetus is *innocent*?
    - JP: it is weak and defenseless
  - Q: Is there any reason to doubt this premise?
    - can it threaten the mother?





PHIL 252: MAKING MORAL DECISIONS **WRAP-UP QUIZ**

Graded iClicker QUIZ: Select the best single answer

2. John Paul first defends the humanity of the fetus by appealing to:

(A) his personal faith  
 (B) the feelings of mothers  
 (C) science  
 (D) None of the above

PHIL 252: MAKING MORAL DECISIONS

**LECTURE 14: MORAL CONTROVERSIES: ANTI-ABORTION**

**Material today**

1. John Paul II on the humanity of the fetus (continued)
2. John Paul II on exceptions to rules about abortion

**The humanity of the fetus**

- John Paul applies DCT to the abortion controversy:
  1. DIVINE COMMAND THEORY: It is wrong to kill innocent human beings.
  2. **Fetuses are innocent human beings.**
  3. Therefore, it is wrong to kill fetuses.
- Q: Why think the fetus is *human*?
 

quote In fact, "from the time an ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already. This has always been clear, and ... (A) modern genetic science offers clear confirmation. ... Tertullian affirms: 'It is anticipated murder to prevent someone from being born: ... (B) He who will one day be a man is a man already.' ... --John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*



  - the fetus is genetically human
  - potential individual human being are human already
- Q: Is there any reason to doubt this premise, or the reason he's given for it?

**The humanity of the fetus**

Q: Is anything that's potentially human *actually* human?  
 (A) Yes (B) No

Q: Is an acorn *actually* an oak?  
 (A) Yes (B) No

- **Objection to (2):** just as an acorn is not an oak, a potential human is not an actual human
- Q: How could you respond to this objection?
  - perhaps there's a difference between the fetus and the acorn; the odds that the fetus develops may be greater
  - but what about an acorn in perfect conditions for growth?
  - can JP point to any other difference between the acorn and the fetus?


**The humanity of the fetus**

Q: Why might a *divine command theorist* would support premise (2)?

- because *God says it is human*:

quote All human beings, from their mothers' womb, belongs to God who searches them and knows them, who forms them and knits them together with his own hands, who gazes on them when they are tiny shapeless embryos and already sees in them the adults of tomorrow whose days are numbered and whose vocation is even now written in "the book of life."  
 --John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

- this is independent of whether it has a "soul" or not
- (he never takes a position on that)



## The humanity of the fetus

1. It is wrong to kill innocent human beings.  
 2. Fetuses are innocent human beings.  
 3. Therefore, it is wrong to kill fetuses.

Q: Do you agree with premise (1)?  
 (A) Yes (B) No

Q: Do you agree with premise (2)?  
 (A) Yes (B) No

Q: Do you agree with the conclusion?  
 (A) Yes (B) No

- if you agreed with the premises, but *not* the conclusion, you're in trouble: *the premises logically entail the conclusion*

## Exceptions

Q: Do you support abortion for the mother's economic improvement?  
 (A) Yes (B) No

Q: Do you support abortion in the case of rape or incest?  
 (A) Yes (B) No

Q: Do you support abortion to protect the life of the mother?  
 (A) Yes (B) No

- Q: What do you think the Pope says about the last ?
- he thinks there are *no exceptions*:

I declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium. No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can ever make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church. —John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

- Q: Why disagree with John Paul?

## The humanity of the fetus

1. It is wrong to kill innocent human beings.  
 2. Fetuses are innocent human beings.  
 3. Therefore, it is wrong to kill fetuses.

- Objection:** *something* must be wrong with one of the premises, because the conclusion entails absurdities
  - e.g., you might think it's absurd that abortion is wrong even in cases of rape, incest, the life of the mother
  - but you'd still need to figure out which premise was wrong

## PHIL 252: MAKING MORAL DECISIONS

## WRAP-UP QUIZ

Graded iClicker QUIZ: Select the best single answer

3. The only reason John Paul II gives for thinking the fetus is human is a scientific one.  
 (A) True  
 (B) False
4. Pope John Paul is opposed to abortion:  
 (A) to improve the economic condition of the mother  
 (B) in cases of rape and incest  
 (C) to protect the life of the mother  
 (D) in all of the above cases