

Preliminary reading quiz

Graded iClicker QUIZ: Select the best single answer

1. Pope John Paul II thinks which of these is the ultimate form of reality?

- (A) Life on earth
- (B) Divinely granted life in a supernatural dimension
- (C) Living it up
- (D) None of the above

2. The Pope thinks that abortion is permissible in case it is necessary to save the life of the mother.

- (A) True (B) False



Abortion as a philosophical controversy

- 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
- *Evangelium Vitae* shows how the church's position on abortion depends on deep philosophic premises, in:
 - ethics
 - metaphysics
 - epistemology



The ethics of abortion

Q: In which direction do you lean on the abortion debate?
(A) "Pro-life" (B) "Pro-choice"

• Q: What is the Pope's major thesis about abortion?

quote [D]irect 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.
— Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

- he thinks abortion is immoral *under any circumstance*

Q: Do you agree with this position on abortion?
(A) Yes (B) No

- this is obviously an ethical position in and of itself
- but it depends on a variety of deeper ethical principles



The ethics of abortion

- Q: Why would the Pope oppose abortion even if it only involved *abandoning* a child?

quote It is true that the decision to have an abortion is often tragic and painful for the mother, insofar as the decision to rid herself of the fruit of conception is not made for purely selfish reasons or out of convenience, but out of a desire to protect certain important values such as her own health or a decent standard of living for the other members of the family.
— Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

- because abandoning (or killing) a child for convenience is *selfish*

- Q: Why is selfishness immoral?

quote Every man is his "brother's keeper", because God entrusts us to one another. And it is also in view of this entrusting that God gives everyone freedom, a freedom which possesses an inherently relational dimension. This is a great gift of the Creator, placed as it is at the service of the person and of his fulfillment through the gift of self and openness to others; but when freedom is made absolute in an individualistic way, it is emptied of its original content, and its very meaning and dignity are contradicted.
— Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

- because the Pope says God commands us to be our brothers' keepers



The ethics of abortion

- The Pope thinks abortion is immoral *under any circumstance*
 - (in part) because abandoning (or killing) a child for convenience is *selfish*
 - (in part) because the Pope says God commands us to be our brothers' keepers

def **Ethical altruism** is the theory that serving the interests of others is the primary purpose of morality.

- the Pope (and Christianity) side with altruism against egoism
- But why does the Pope support this theory?



The ethics of abortion

- **Q:** Why does this Pope oppose abortion insofar as it *does* involve killing?

quote The moral gravity of procured abortion is apparent in all its truth if we recognize that we are dealing with murder and, in particular, when we consider the specific elements involved. The one eliminated is a human being at the very beginning of life. —Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

- the embryo/fetus is an innocent human being

quote Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves "the creative action of God", and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. 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". With these words the Instruction Donum Vitae sets forth the central content of God's revelation on the sacredness and inviolability of human life.

—Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

- killing an innocent human being is immoral
- *This can be distilled into a simple argument*

The ethics of abortion

- *The Pope's anti-abortion argument:*

arg *Premise 1:* It is wrong to kill innocent human beings

Premise 2: Fetuses are innocent human beings.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is wrong to kill fetuses.

- arguments are philosophers' tools for establishing philosophic truth
- a *sound* argument is one that has:
 - premises that are all known to be *true*
 - has premises that are *relevant* to the conclusion

Q: Do you agree with the conclusion?

(A) Yes (B) No

- *this* argument has premises that are definitely relevant: if you agree with the premises, *logically* the conclusion must be true
- *so why think the premises are true?*

The ethics of abortion

- *The Pope's anti-abortion argument:*

arg *Premise 1:* It is wrong to kill innocent human beings

Premise 2: Fetuses are innocent human beings.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is wrong to kill fetuses.

- **Q:** Why does the Pope think premise 1 is true?
 - there is a *divine commandment* saying "Thou Shalt not kill"
 - *deeper:* God is the creator of life, it's up to him to decide who lives/dies
- def. **Divine command theory** is the theory that the will of God is the ultimate standard of morality.
- **Q:** Why does the Pope think premise 2 is true?
 - offers scientific evidence: the embryo/fetus has human genetic potential
 - *deeper:* a point related to divine command theory...

Lecture 4: Philosophical Controversies: Pope John Paul II on Abortion (continued)

philosophy of the

human person

Fall 2016

Ben Bayer

The ethics of abortion

- *The Pope's anti-abortion argument:*

arg *Premise 1:* It is wrong to kill innocent human beings

Premise 2: Fetuses are innocent human beings.

Conclusion: Therefore, it is wrong to kill fetuses.

- The Pope's reasons for accepting premise 1:
 - there is a *divine commandment* saying "Thou Shalt not kill" (and he accepts *divine command theory*)
 - *deeper:* God is the creator of life, it's up to him to decide who lives/dies
- The Pope's reasons for accepting premise 2:
 - offers scientific evidence: the embryo/fetus has human genetic potential
 - *deeper:* a metaphysical point that divine command theory also depends on....

Metaphysics

- Q: What does the Pope think about the world we see around us?

quote Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence. It is a process which, unexpectedly and undeservedly, is enlightened by the promise and renewed by the gift of divine life, which will reach its full realization in eternity (cf. 1 Jn 3:1-2). At the same time, it is precisely this supernatural calling which highlights the relative character of each individual's earthly life. After all, life on earth is not an "ultimate" but a "penultimate" reality; even so, it remains a sacred reality entrusted to us. --Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

- it's not all there is: there is a *supernatural reality*

def. **Supernaturalism** is the theory that there is a dimension of reality independent of the world accessible by observation and logic.

- *note how he is saying: human life is valuable because of its supernatural stage*



Metaphysics

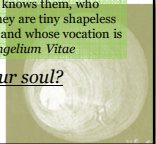
- Q: Does a God just live outside the natural realm? Or more?

quote The life which God bestows upon man is much more than mere existence in time. It is a drive towards fullness of life; it is the seed of an existence which transcends the very limits of time: "For God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity" (Wis 2:23). --Pope John Paul II, *EV*

- God creates the natural world, determines the nature of everything in it
- this is *why* he defines *what is moral* (PREMISE 1, div. command theory)
- and it's *why* he defines *what is a human being* (PREMISE 2):

quote All human beings, from their mothers' womb, belong 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" (cf. Ps 139: 1, 13-16). --Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

- *in this view, does God gaze upon our genetics, or on our soul?*



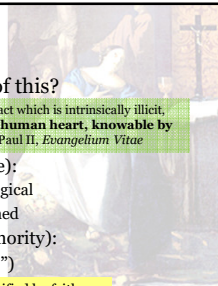
Epistemology

- Q: How does the Pope claim to know any of this?

quote 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. --Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

- "knowable by reason itself" (logic and evidence):
 - the anti-abortion argument itself attempts to be logical
 - one of its premises is partially scientifically informed
- "proclaimed by the church" (scripture and authority):
- "written in every human heart" (personal faith")

def. **Fideism** is the view that some beliefs can be justified by faith, not by reason or evidence.



Wrap-up quiz

Graded iClicker QUIZ: Select the best single answer

3. The Pope's ultimate reason for thinking we should not kill innocent human beings is that:

- (A) It is unkind to kill innocent human beings
- (B) Only God has the right to give and take life
- (C) Other people's lives are of great personal benefit to us
- (D) All of the above

4. The Pope claims that abortion is immoral because:

- (A) He argues for it based on premises supported by the Bible
- (B) It says so explicitly in the Bible
- (C) He thinks everyone agrees it is true