

Co-hosted with Women's Studies

'The Right to Bodily Autonomy and the Abortion Controversy'

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In her famous paper, "A Defense of Abortion," Judith Jarvis Thomson argues, by way of analogy, that abortion is morally permissible in cases of rape, when the mother's life is at stake, and in contraceptive failure. Along the way, Thomson appeals to a pivotal premise, the right to bodily autonomy, though she does not defend it in this paper. I examine four ways in which we can strengthen Thomson's conclusions about abortion by invoking the right to bodily autonomy. The four cases are: (1) the woman whose pregnancy lasts only one hour and is the result of rape; (2) the woman who in her seventh month of pregnancy wants an abortion so she won't have to postpone a trip; (3) the woman who does not take contraceptive measures and willingly engages in sex and becomes pregnant; and (4) the woman who becomes pregnant when her consent to sex is more nebulous than the case of stranger rape, as in date rape or when the woman has desires deformed by patriarchy. Although I do not, of course, give a full defense of the right to bodily autonomy, I aim to tweak it a bit through my arguments to say what it must involve.

Wednesday, February 6, 2013
Hagey Hall, Room 373
12:00 - 1:30 p.m.