

The Derivative and Detached Objections to Abortion and Euthanasia

PHIL 102

Ethics, Politics, & Law

Gallup Poll 1991

- “Abortion is just as bad as killing a person who has already been born, it is murder.” 36.8%
- “Abortion is murder, but it is not as bad as killing someone who has already been born.” 11.5%
- “Abortion is not murder, but it does involve the taking of human life 28.3%

Wirthlin Poll 1990

- “All human life, including that of the unborn, should be protected.”
 - Extremely 31%
 - Very convincing 29%
 - Not very convincing 22%
 - Not convincing at all 11%
- Roughly same results for “Every unborn child has a basic right to life.”

Time/CNN Poll 1992

- “A woman should be able to get an abortion if she decides she wants one no matter what the reason.”
49%
- “Abortion should be legal in certain circumstances.” 38%
- “Abortion should be illegal in all circumstances.” 10%

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll 1992

- "Abortion should be illegal." 26%
- "Abortion should not be illegal."
67%

Wirthlin Poll 1990

- “The life of the unborn should be protected.”
- “Unborn children have a right to life.”
- Extremely or very convincing 60%
- “Abortion should be illegal in all circumstances”
- Extremely or very convincing 7%
- Abortion should be legal only when it is necessary to save the life of the mother.”
- Extremely or very convincing 14%

What Explains These Results?

- Polls are inaccurate.
- It depends on the way the questions are asked.
- Americans hold contradictory views about abortion.
- Dworkin's hypothesis
 - People do not object to abortion from a derivative perspective
 - People do object from detached perspective

Derived Objections to Abortion

- Derived from rights and interests
- Fetuses have interests
- Fetuses have moral and legal rights
- Dworkin's analysis
 - We don't really believe this
 - It makes no sense to claim fetuses have interests
 - Interest in life?
 - Interest in avoiding pain?
 - Mistakenly believing this makes the abortion controversy so intractable

Detached Objections to Abortion

- Detached from rights and interests
- Fetuses have no interests
- Fetuses have no moral or legal rights
- Human life has intrinsic or sacred value
- One can hold to the detached objection passionately
- One **can** still be pro-choice