

Handout on the Responsibility Objection

PHIL 1200 honors

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The Objection

Possibly morally relevant difference between *Shimp v. McFall* and *Barbara*:

Shimp didn't do anything to make it the case that McFall was in need of Shimp's assistance, but Barbara did do something to make it the case that Bob was in need of her assistance.

What this might show:

While McFall has no right to Shimp's assistance, Bob does have a right to Barbara's assistance (and, in particular, to the use of Barbara's body).

A question, and two different answers:

Q: *What about Barbara making it so that Bob is in need of her assistance makes it the case that Bob has a right to her assistance?*

One answer: Consent. In having sex, Barbara thereby gives her consent to any fetus that might result to use her body.

A better answer: Responsibility. If Barbara gets pregnant, she is responsible for the fact that there is now a fetus who needs to use her body, and so it's on her to lend the fetus her assistance.

The Responsibility Principle (RP):

"If [a] as a foreseeable result of your voluntary act someone will die if you don't assist them, and [b] they wouldn't need your assistance if you hadn't done the act, then they have a right to your assistance." (Boonin, pp. 69-70)

In slogan form:

"If it's your fault that someone needs your help, then you have to help." (70)

The Responsibility Principle Illustrated:

Hunting Accident

The Responsibility Principle and Abortion:

Alice

Barbara

The Responsibility Principle and *Shimp v. McFall*.

Boonin's Original Argument by Analogy for the View that Abortion Should be Legal in Cases of Contraceptive Failure:

P1. It would be wrong for the state to force Shimp to let McFall use Shimp's body in *Slippery Floor*.

→ P2. The state's forcing Shimp to let McFall use Shimp's body in *Slippery Floor* is morally analogous to the state's forcing Barbara to let Bob use her body.

C. Therefore, it would be wrong for the state to force Barbara to let Bob use her body.

Boonin's Reply

Two Versions of the Responsibility Principle

RP1 ("first responsibility principle"):

If (a) as a foreseeable result of your voluntary act someone will die if you don't assist them and (b1) if you hadn't done the act, the person wouldn't exist (and so would not be in need of your assistance), then they have a right to your assistance.

RP2 ("second responsibility principle"):

If (a) as a foreseeable result of your voluntary act someone will die if you don't assist them and (b2) if you hadn't done the act, the person would exist and would be doing fine (and so would not be in need of your existence), then they have a right to your assistance.

Let's apply both principles to the key cases:

Slippery Floor

Fireworks

Barbara

The upshot: to decide what to make of Boonin's whole defense of abortion rights, we have to decide whether to accept RP1.

Boonin's counterexample to RP1:

Toxic Heimlich

Boonin's conclusion:

- RP can mean either RP1 or RP2
- RP2 is true, but doesn't imply that Bob has a right to use Barbara's body
- RP1 implies that Bob has a right to use Barbara's body, but RP1 isn't true.
- So the responsibility objections fails.