Present self-represented futures of value are a reason for the wrongness of killing

S J Parsons

In Marquis’s recent paper he has not satisfactorily shown that killing does not adversely affect the victim’s present self-represented desires for their future. Marquis is correct in believing life and death are distinct, but living and dying are not. In fact, to use a well-known saying, “the second we are born we start to die”. During the process of dying, whether it be long as in over our lifetime or short as in as we are being killed, there comes a point when the present realistic desires we have we know will never be satisfied. This is why killing can be wrong. This would imply killing an unconscious person, infant, or fetus cannot be wrong. But such killing can be wrong, despite the person killed not experiencing the desire not to be killed as he was dying. Killing can be wrong because others can have a present self-represented desire for that person not to be killed to have been killed. If this line of reasoning is correct, then the “best interests” principle often applied to life and death considerations regarding unconscious persons, infants, and fetuses, is invalid, as such human beings do not have present desires. All that matters is what relevant others rationally desire, after being informed of the facts and the consequences, for that unconscious person, infant or fetus.
as such human beings do not have present desires. All that matters is what relevant others rationally desire, after being informed of the facts and consequences, for that unconscious person, infant or fetus. The important issue of what constitutes a rational and hence valid desire, and how we should protect fetuses, infants and unconscious persons from the irrational desires of others is the topic of another paper.

Now returning to another of Marquis’ arguments, he also believes a future present version of Brown’s self-represented future of value is false, despite it “not underwrit[ing] the per-missibility of abortion”. Marquis claims many future present desires for a future can be thwarted by knowledge alone, such as news of terminal cancer. Thus, telling a patient they have cancer can be as wrong as killing them. This is nonsense. The reason is that bad news may alter some, but rarely all, of a person’s present desires for a future of value. Bad news simply allows a person to presently hold, both now and in the future, only realistic desires for their future. Should accurate and truthful bad news remove all of a person’s present desires for anything, then they will want to die, and rightly so. Killing someone forces the realisation of the whole loss of one’s future, and is a way of “delivering bad news” that can clearly be wrong.

Marquis has not satisfactorily shown that killing does not adversely affect the victim’s present self-represented desires for their future. Thus, must he now prefer this over his own potential future of value account of the wrongness of killing and allow abortion?

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