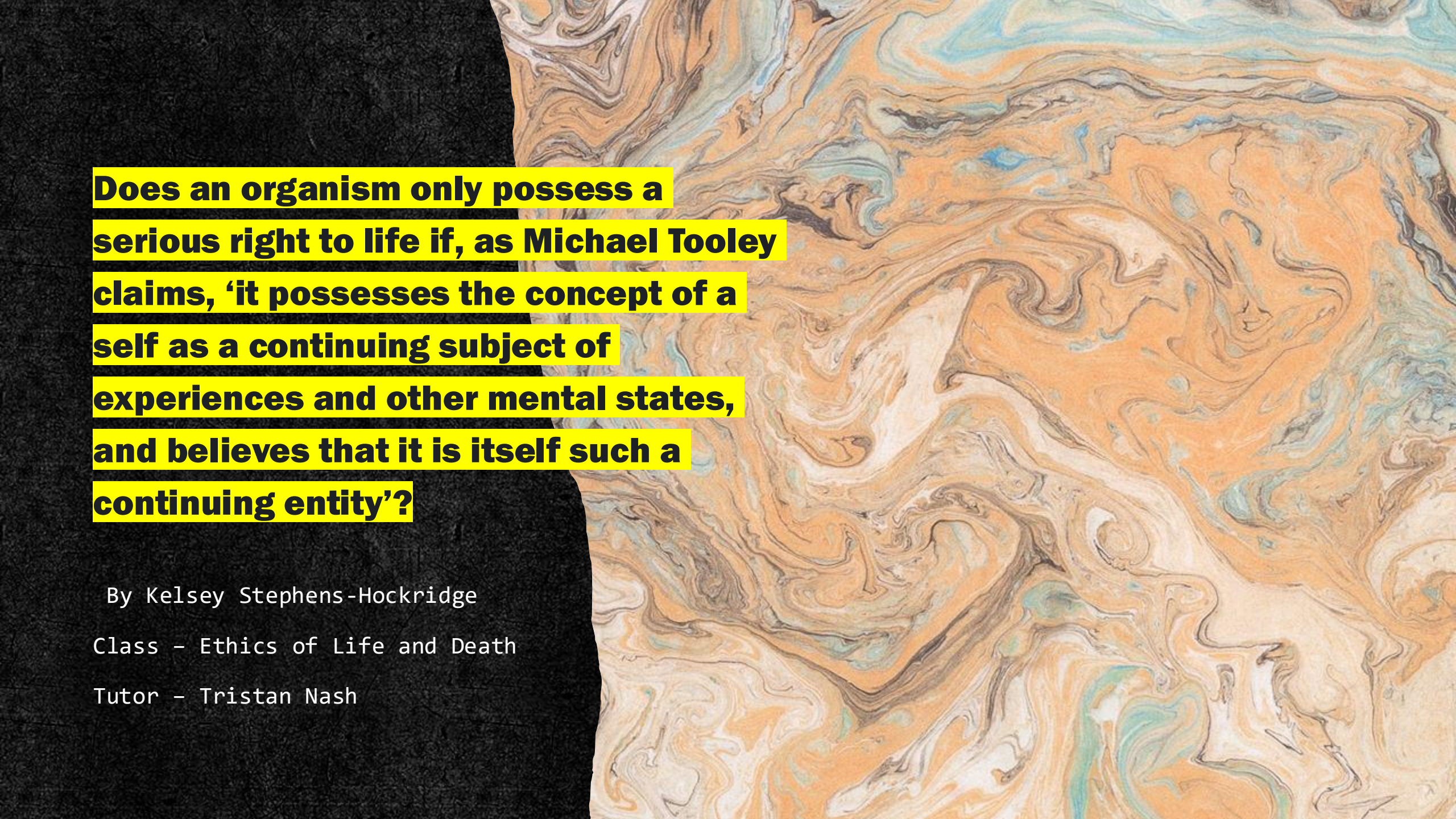




Does an organism only possess a serious right to life if, as Michael Tooley claims, ‘it possesses the concept of a self as a continuing subject of experiences and other mental states, and believes that it is itself such a continuing entity’?

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Class – Ethics of Life and Death

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What is a 'right to life?'

- The 'right to life' means generally, that no one should be able to take your life, regardless of circumstances.
- In Ethics, the 'right to life' holds high importance.
- According to Tooley, human fetuses and infants do not possess this concept of a continuing self, and thus they do not have a serious right to life.

Who is Michael Tooley?

- ❖ Tooley is an American Philosopher.
- ❖ Best known for contributions to metaphysics.
- ❖ Tooley published "Abortion and Infanticide" in 1972, which is the primary source of his research and arguments on the subject of fetuses and abortion.
- ❖ Tooley's main argument from "Abortion and Infanticide" asserts that if abortion is morally permissible, then infanticide should also be morally permissible.

Tooley's argument explained.

- “An organism only possesses a serious right to life if it possesses the concept of a self as a continuing subject of experiences and other mental states and believes that it is itself such a continuing entity.”
- "Concept of a self"
- "Continuing subject of experiences and other mental states"
- "Believes that it is itself such a continuing entity"
- "Serious right to life"

Why the concept of 'self' matters.

- Philosophical rationale – Self-awareness is linked to wanting to continue life and ones self.
- Self-Consciousness = Right to life.
- E.g. Preventing the body to react in self-defence

Implications of Tooley's Claim.

- Tooley never mentions which 'organism' has or does not have a right to life.
- Toddlers – If they ask for something or use movements that suggest they need something, does that still disregard their right to life?
- What about animals? – As we don't know which organism he is referring to, how can we suggest that this does not apply to animals as well as humans.

Criticisms and Counterarguments.

- Infants and fetuses have the potential to develop a self concept.
- Killing a fetus or infant is wrong because it destroys the future person.
- Religious perspective – all life is sacred and should be lead in the eyes of God.
- "Thou shalt not kill" and Euthanasia.

Comparisons/Criticisms with Other Philosophers.

- Judith Jarvis Thompson – bodily autonomy vs. Tooley's psychological personhood.
- Peter Singer – Utilitarianism with personhood vs. Tooley's strictly rights based argument.
- Pro life vs. Pro choice.

Practical Implications.

- Abortion policy.
- End of life decisions.
- Animal rights welfare.
- Moral and Social controversies.

Evaluation.

- Confronts morally difficult issues.
- Avoids speciesism.
- Opens the door to animal rights.

- Ignores potentiality.
- Practical uncertainty.
- Overly rationalistic.

Conclusion.

- Tooley needs a more inclusive and sensitive approach.
- Presents a logically coherent and philosophically rigorous account of moral personhood.
- Framework is too narrow to say that people with disabilities and infants do not have a self-concept.
- People in comas can be 'self-aware' but not physically present to explain the awareness e.g. dreams, visions etc.