

## Imminent Viability

In an argument, we often find that several main positions get staked out. These are often the named positions, representing a public sense of the main positions in a debate. They often show which issues or constellation of issues tend to be most important and positions on them. For example, in the abortion debate, we tend to find one group that emphasizes that a fetus is a human at conception, and another group that emphasizes the rights of a woman to choose to terminate her pregnancy. This division makes it seem that these positions are the ends of a single continuum, when in reality these perspectives are more likely orthogonal to each other. For example, one could believe that one should not initiate force on other humans and that a woman has the contextual right to chose to terminate her pregnancy.

In an attempt to answer determine when an entity becomes human, we can turn to religious traditions. However, religious traditions differ on when they believe an individual is an individual in the womb. Some have it at conception, some not till months later. In place of these, we could adopt a position based on observable criteria. For example, we might argue that the potential human acquires its human rights when it is imminently viable. Within an appropriate range of measures and distributions, this would establish an objective set of criteria of when an individual could survive outside of the womb<sup>1</sup>.

With appropriate expectations, this would imply that after that point the potential human becomes an actual human and the default assumption would be that one could not terminate a pregnancy. Individuals should be made aware of the timing of this imminent viability, and thus have plenty of time to decide what they wish to do.

Someone who agreed with this might be called an “imminent viabilist.”

I don't think these suggestions will end the abortion debate. For example, we still have to decide on the rights of the father, and whether imminent viability includes premie or neonatal care, and many other issues. I do hope, however, that they or something like them tones down the vitriolic one encounters around this time of year with the anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

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<sup>1</sup> I imagine that the imminent viabilists would divide themselves into two main camps: natural and artificial. Those in the natural camp would argue that the fetus would need to be able to survive on its own similar to other neonates. Those in the artificial camp would argue that the standard is that a fetus could be able to survive with the culturally available premie care. I imagine the real answer is somewhere between these two positions.