

Five Bad Ways to Argue about Abortion

Pro-life advocates argue their case with science and philosophy, but their pro-choice critics do not always respond in kind.

By Scott Klusendorf

Pro-life advocates contend that elective abortion unjustly takes the life of a defenseless human being. This simplifies the abortion controversy by focusing public attention on just one question: Is the unborn a member of the human family? If so, killing him or her to benefit others is a serious moral wrong. Conversely, if the unborn are not human, elective abortion requires no more justification than having a tooth pulled.

Scientifically, we know that from the earliest stages of development, the unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings. Leading embryology textbooks confirm this.¹ Prior to advocating elective abortion, former Planned Parenthood President Dr. Alan Guttmacher was perplexed that anyone, much less a medical doctor, would question these basic scientific facts. "This all seems so simple and evident that it is difficult to picture a time when it wasn't part of the common knowledge," he wrote in his book *Life in the Making*.²

Philosophically, there is no morally significant difference between the embryo you once were and the adult you are today. Differences of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency are not relevant in the way that abortion advocates need them to be. The simple acronym **SLED** can be used to illustrate these non-essential differences:³

Size: True, embryos are smaller than newborns and adults, but why is that relevant? Do we really want to say that large people are more valuable than small ones? Men are generally larger than women, but that doesn't mean they deserve more rights. Size doesn't equal value.

Level of development: True, embryos and fetuses are less developed than you and I. But again, why is this relevant? Four year-old girls are less developed than 14 year-old ones. Should older children have more rights than their younger siblings? Some people say that the immediate capacity for self-awareness and a desire to go on living makes one valuable. But if that is true, newborns do not qualify as valuable human beings. Infants

¹ See T.W. Sadler, *Langman's Embryology*, 5th ed. (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1993) p. 3; Keith L. Moore, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology* (Toronto: B.C. Decker, 1988) p. 2; O'Rahilly, Ronand and Muller, Pabiola, *Human Embryology and Teratology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley-Liss, 1996) pp. 8, 29. See also Maureen L. Condit, "Life: Defining the Beginning by the End," *First Things*, May 2003.

² A. Guttmacher, *Life in the Making: the Story of Human Procreation* (New York: Viking Press, 1933) p. 3

³ SLED test initially developed by Stephen Schwarz but modified significantly and explained here by Scott Klusendorf. Stephen Schwarz, *The Moral Question of Abortion* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990) pp. 17-18.

do not acquire distinct self-awareness and memory until several months *after birth*.⁴ (Best case scenario, infants acquire limited self-awareness three months after birth, when the synapse connections increase from 56 trillion to 1,000 trillion.) As abortion advocate and philosopher Dean Stretton writes, “Any plausible pro-choice theory will have to deny newborns a full right to life. That's counterintuitive.”⁵

Environment: Where you are has no bearing on *who* you are. Does your value change when you cross the street or roll over in bed? If not, how can a journey of eight inches down the birth-canal suddenly change the essential nature of the unborn from non-human to human? If the unborn are not already valuable human beings, merely changing their location can't make them so.

Degree of Dependency: If viability bestows human value, then all those who depend on insulin or kidney medication are not valuable and we may kill them. Conjoined twins who share blood type and bodily systems also have no right to life.

In short, although humans differ immensely with respect to talents, accomplishments, and degrees of development, they are nonetheless equal (and valuable) because they all have the same human nature.

Five Bad Ways to Argue

Nonetheless, some people ignore the scientific and philosophic case that pro-life advocates present and argue for abortion based on self-interest. That is the lazy way out. If we care about truth, we will courageously follow the facts wherever they lead. Here are five common mistakes people make arguing for abortion.

Mistake #1: confuse objective claims with subjective ones

When pro-life advocates say that elective abortion is morally wrong because it unjustly takes the life of a defenseless child, they are making a particular *type* of claim.⁶ Specifically, they are making a *moral* claim about the rightness or wrongness of abortion. Of course, moral claims can sometimes be mistaken, as for example, when a man equates eating peanuts with racial genocide. But just because the claim is false does not mean it's purely subjective. The man making it is not offering an opinion; he's claiming to be *right*.

⁴ Conor Liston & Jerome Kagan, “Brain Development: Memory Enhancement in Early Childhood,” *Nature* 419, 896 (2002). See also O’Rahilly, Ronand and Muller, Pabiola, *Human Embryology and Teratology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley-Liss, 1996) p. 8.

⁵ Correspondence between Scott Klusendorf and Dean Stretton, October 2002. While I do not share Stretton’s views, I admire his candor. Stretton goes on to argue that the pro-life view that zygotes have a right to life is equally counterintuitive. I disagree. While it’s counterintuitive at first pass, it’s really a naive intuition that easily changes when informed with the facts (like the scientific and philosophic ones noted above). This isn’t on par with the counterintuitiveness of killing a newborn.

⁶ Gregory Koukl, *Ten Bad Arguments against Religion* (audio cassette). Order at 1-800-2-REASON.

Many people, however, misconstrue the kind of claim the pro-lifer is making in order to respond to one they like better, thus avoiding the hard work of demonstrating why, exactly, the pro-lifer is mistaken. Consider the following responses to the moral claim, "Elective abortion is morally wrong."

"That's just your view."

As a guest on the television show *Politically Incorrect*, former super-model Kathy Ireland™ gave a carefully reasoned scientific and philosophic defense of the pro-life position. The show's host, Bill Maher, ignored her evidence completely and shot back with (paraphrase) "Kathy, that's just your view."

What's wrong with this response? Maher was confusing a *moral* claim with a *preference* claim. But there is a difference between disliking something (say, for example, a particular flavor of ice cream) and thinking it is morally wrong. Put simply, when pro-life advocates say that abortion is morally wrong, they are not saying they personally *dislike* abortion or would *prefer* that people not have one. Rather, they are saying that elective abortion is *objectively wrong* for everyone, regardless of how one feels about it. This is why the popular bumper sticker "Don't like abortion? Don't have one!" misses the point entirely. It confuses the two types of claims. (Try this: "Don't like slavery? Don't own a slave!")

Now it may be the case that pro-life advocates like Kathy Ireland™ are mistaken about their claim. Perhaps their evidence that abortion unjustly takes the life of a defenseless child is weak and inconclusive. But instead of proving this with facts and arguments, abortion advocates like Bill Maher ignore the evidence altogether. "Well, that's just your view." This not only relativizes the pro-lifers claim, it is intellectually lazy. It attempts to dismiss evidence rather than refute it.

Imagine if I were to say, "There is a pink elephant in the corner of the room just beneath the window."⁷ How should you respond to my claim? Perhaps I'm mistaken (and chances are I would be), but it would do no good to say, "That's just your view." The problem is I was not offering an *opinion*, I was claiming to be *right*. To refute me, you must show that my claim is false. The correct response is to say, "Your evidence is lousy. We looked in the corner and there is no elephant."

But again, Maher did not do that. At no point did he challenge her facts and arguments. What he said in effect was "Go away Kathy. You have your views and I have mine." This was very condescending because he did not even entertain the possibility that she had good evidence for her claim. Nor did he acknowledge the type of claim she was making.

To sum up, Maher was confusing a preference claim with a distinctly moral one. Preference claims cannot be evaluated as true or false because they are matters of personal taste. You cannot reasonably argue that vanilla ice cream is objectively better

⁷ Illustration is taken from Koukl, "Bad Arguments Against Religion." www.str.org

than chocolate. But moral claims are different. They can be evaluated as true or false based on the evidence. They do not say, “This is better *tasting*,” they say, “This is *right*”. Kathy Ireland's claim was, Abortion is wrong because it takes the life of a defenseless child, and I think I'm right. Maher's glib response did nothing to refute this. In fact, one could stop Maher dead in his tracks by saying, “Bill, it's just your view that it's just my view.”

"Don't force your morality on me."

A student at a Southern California college said this to me after I made a case for the pro-life position in her sociology class. She was in effect saying, “Morality is relative; it's up to me to decide what is right and wrong.” We call this *moral relativism*, the belief that there are no objective standards of right and wrong, only personal preferences. Therefore, we should tolerate other views as being equal to our own.

But as Greg Koukl and Francis Beckwith point out, relativism is seriously flawed for at least three reasons.⁸ First, it is self-refuting. That is to say, it cannot live by its own rules. Second, relativists cannot reasonably say that anything is wrong, including intolerance. Third, it is impossible to live as a relativist.

1) Relativism is self-refuting—it commits intellectual suicide. The student said it was wrong for me to force my views on others, but she could not live with her own rule. Although our dialogue was pleasant, she clearly tried to force her views on me.⁹

Student: You made some good points in your talk, but you shouldn't force your morality on me or anyone else who wants an abortion. It's our choice, isn't it?

Me: Are you saying I'm wrong?

Student: I'm not sure. What do you mean?

Me: Well, you think I'm wrong, don't you? If not, why are you correcting me? And if so, then you're forcing your morality on me, aren't you?

Student: No, I just want to know why you are telling people what they can and cannot do with their lives.

Me: Are you saying I shouldn't do that? That it's wrong? If so, then why are you telling me what I can and cannot do? Why are you forcing your morality on me?

Student (regrouping): I'm confused. Look, the simple fact is that pro-choicers are not forcing women to have abortions, but you want to force women to be mothers. If

⁸ For a full refutation of relativism, see Greg Koukl and Francis Beckwith, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). The authors discuss relativism's seven fatal flaws.

⁹ In this dialogue, I used language and questioning techniques taught by Koukl and Beckwith in *Relativism*. Note: The tone you set for these types of exchanges should be polite and calm, never combative.

you don't like abortion, don't have one. But you shouldn't force your beliefs on others. All I am saying is that pro-life people should be tolerant of other views.

Me: Is that your view?

Student: Yes.

Me: Why are you forcing it on me? That's not very tolerant, is it?

Student: What do you mean? I think women should have a choice and you don't. It's your view that's intolerant, wouldn't you say?

Me: Okay, so you think I'm wrong. What is it you want pro-lifers like me to do?

Student: You should let women decide for themselves and tolerate other views.

Me: Tell me, what exactly do pro-choicers believe?

Student: We believe everyone should decide for themselves and tolerate other views.

Me: So you are demanding that pro-lifers become pro-choicers?

Student: What? No way.

Me: With all due respect, here's what I hear you saying. Unless I agree with you, you will not tolerate my view. Privately, you'll let me think whatever I want, but you don't want me to *act* as if my view is true. It seems you think tolerance is a virtue *if and only if people agree with you*.

Put succinctly, her argument for tolerance was in fact a patronizing form of intolerance. She spoke of moral neutrality, but tried to force her own views on me.

I once read an editorial in the *Toronto Star* that was similarly intolerant of pro-life advocates. While decrying the "single-minded moral supremacism" of those who call abortion killing, journalist Michele Landsberg writes:

Will no priest or minister publicly resolve to stop the indoctrination of youth to view abortion as murder? Is none ashamed of the blood-drenched holocaust vocabulary used so cynically (and anti-semitically) to whip up fervor for the crusade? Where are the outspoken cries of conscience by bishops and cardinals who should be appalled by the evidence of links between anti-abortion fanatics and far-right militias, neo Nazis, and white supremacists? Is there no religious leader who regrets his church's role in feeding this blind frenzy? Will none of them repent of their excesses, will none call a halt to their sickeningly manipulative campaigns of "precious little feet," their fake "documentaries" about screaming fetuses? You'd think that the world had enough lessons in the dangers of hate speech.

Like hers? It doesn't seem to trouble Ms. Landsberg that her own vitriolic rhetoric could incite abortion advocates to commit acts of violence against pro-lifers. She continues:

It was the unbridled hate speech of fundamentalist fanatics in Israel who spurred on the "devout" murder of then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin....We've seen how homophobic rantings from right-wing American leaders, notably the Senate republican leader, led to escalating gay bashings, culminating in the heart-wrenching death of Matthew Shepherd in Wyoming....Denominational schools [should] begin to teach respect for the laws of our pluralistic society, rather than preaching single-minded moral supremacism.¹⁰

Again, like her own?

Notice what is going on here. She decries "moral supremacism," but says that anyone who disagrees with her view on abortion is an indoctrinator of youth, a fanatic, an anti-Semite, a neo-Nazi, a white supremacist, a manipulator of facts, a purveyor of hate speech, homophobic, a gay-basher, a religious bully, responsible for the death of Matthew Shepherd, and finally, a fundamentalist fanatic like those who murdered Yitzhak Rabin.

One can hardly imagine a finer piece of self-refuting rhetoric—all, of course, in the name of tolerance.

Sometimes the demand for tolerance is laughable. While driving my sons to a baseball game at Dodger Stadium, a young woman in a white pickup truck began tailgating me. Visibly angered by a pro-life sticker on my rear window, she stayed on my bumper for a mile or so. Finally, she pulled beside me and extended a certain part of her anatomy skyward as she passed. She then cut in front of me. At that moment, I noticed a bumper sticker on her truck. It said, "Celebrate Diversity." The message was clear: In a pluralistic society, we should tolerate other views. Ironically, the driver saw no contradiction between her unwillingness to tolerate (or celebrate) *my* point of view and her bumper sticker that said we should tolerate *all* points of view. That is what I mean when I say that relativism is self-refuting.

Are pro-choice claims for moral neutrality self-refuting?

On a more sophisticated level, we often hear that society should confer a large degree of liberty by not legislating on controversial moral issues for which there is no consensus, especially if those issues incite deep division. Abortion, the argument goes, is a divisive and controversial issue. Therefore, it should be left to personal choice. But this view is itself controversial. Do we have a consensus that we should not legislate on controversial matters? Moreover, slavery and racism were controversial and divisive issues. Are we to conclude that it was wrong to legislate against them? The fact that people disagree is no reason to suppose that nobody is correct.

¹⁰ Michele Landsberg, "Words, Actions Can Fight Anti-Choice Violence," *Toronto Star*, October 31, 1998.

Paul D. Simmons, meanwhile, writes that pro-lifers are guilty of “speculative metaphysics” whenever they claim that the unborn are persons from conception. (Metaphysics has to do with the ultimate grounding or reality of things such as, What makes humans valuable in the first place? And where do rights come from?) For Simmons, metaphysical claims for the pro-life view are ultimately “religious” in nature and for that reason, they have no place in public policy. If you think the early fetus is a subject of rights, you are entitled to your own religious view, but you can’t force that speculative opinion on others who disagree. When it comes to religion and metaphysics, the state should remain neutral and allow abortion until the fetus acquires viability (i.e., the ability to live independent of the mother).

Simmons’s view, however, is self-refuting. As Beckwith points out, the nature of the abortion debate is such that all positions on abortion presuppose a metaphysical view of human value, and for this reason, the pro-choice position Simmons defends is not entitled to a privileged philosophical standing in our legal framework.¹¹ At issue is not which view of abortion has metaphysical underpinnings and which does not, but which metaphysical view of human value is correct, pro-life or abortion-choice?

The pro-life view is that humans are intrinsically valuable in virtue of the kind of thing they are. True, they differ immensely with respect to talents, accomplishments, and degrees of development, but they are nonetheless equal because they all have the same human nature. Their right to life comes to be when they come to be (conception). Simmons’s own abortion-choice view is that humans have value (and hence, rights) not in virtue of the kind of thing they are, but only because of an acquired property such as self-awareness or viability.¹² Because the early fetus lacks the immediate capacity for these things, it is not a person with rights. Notice that Simmons is doing the abstract work of metaphysics. That is, he is using philosophical reflection to defend a disputed view of human persons.¹³ Hence, Simmons’s attempt to disqualify the pro-life view from public policy based on its alleged metaphysical underpinnings works equally well to disqualify his own view.

2) It is impossible for a moral relativist to say that anything is wrong, including intolerance. If morals are relative, then who are you to say that I should be tolerant? Perhaps my individual morality says intolerance is just fine. Why, then, should I allow anyone to force tolerance on me as a virtue if my preference is intolerance?

The truth is, a moral relativist cannot legitimately say that anything is wrong or truly evil. My colleague Greg Koukl once challenged a relativist with this question. "Do you think it is wrong to torture babies for fun?" She paused, then replied, "Well, I wouldn't want to do that to my baby." Greg responded, "That's not what I asked you. I didn't ask if you *liked* torturing babies for fun, I asked if it was *wrong* to torture babies for fun." The relativist was caught and she knew it. She chuckled and went on to another subject.

¹¹ Francis J. Beckwith, “Law, Religion, and the Metaphysics of Abortion: A Reply to Simmons,” *Journal of Church and State*, Winter 2001.

¹² Simmons argues for one, the other, or both depending on the essay you read.

¹³ Beckwith, *Ibid.*

If it is up to us to decide right and wrong, then there is no difference between Mother Theresa and Adolph Hitler. They just had different preferences. Mother Theresa liked to help people and Hitler liked to kill them. Who are we to judge?

3) It is impossible to live as a moral relativist. As C.S. Lewis points out, a person who claims there is no objective morality will complain if you break a promise or cut in line.¹⁴ And if you steal his stereo, he will protest loudly. If I were a crook, I would reply to the relativist, “Do you think stealing stereos is wrong? Well, that's just your view. My morality says it's perfectly acceptable. Who are you to force your views on me?” Simply put, moral relativists inevitably make moral judgements. They espouse a view they cannot live with.

I think you are starting to get the picture. Relativism is not tolerant of other views. In fact, it tries to suppress them. To cite one more example, during the 2001 winter semester, pro-life students at the University of North Carolina displayed 20 large panels (each 6 feet by 13 feet) depicting the grisly reality of abortion. Known as the Genocide Awareness Project (GAP—see www.abortionno.org), these pictures have been displayed at over 100 universities nationwide. Though invited to do so, pro-abortion students at UNC refused to participate in a structured public debate, but demanded instead that campus police forcibly remove the display. One pro-abortion student, Marcus Harvey, insisted the display was intolerant, ignorant, and must be removed.

I wrote a reply to Mr. Harvey that was posted (in part) on *The Daily Tar Heel* website:¹⁵

Marcus Harvey's comments about the Genocide Awareness Project are typical of today's so-called pro-choicers. Instead of refuting the pro-life argument that it's wrong to kill members of the human family simply because they are in the way and cannot defend themselves, he chastises the campus police for not suppressing ideas that he personally disagrees with. This is very intolerant of him. His message couldn't be clearer: Agree with me or else. Unfortunately, Mr. Harvey has no clue about the true meaning of tolerance. Classical tolerance means that I defend your right to speak even if I disagree with your argument. In fact, the very concept of tolerance presupposes that I think you are wrong. Otherwise, I am not tolerating you; I am agreeing with you! For Mr. Harvey, tolerance means something very different. It means this: Agree with me or I will call upon the police power of the state to suppress your ideas. There is a name this and it's not tolerance: It's called fascism. Thankfully, the university knew better and the pro-life display went forward despite attempts to censor it. Hey, Mr. Harvey: Please don't force your morality on the rest of us.

Moral relativism is expressed one other way: “I'm personally opposed to abortion, but I still think it should be legal.” When people say this, I ask a simple question to clarify things. I ask *why* they personally oppose abortion.¹⁶ Invariably they reply: “We oppose

¹⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996) p.19.

¹⁵ *Daily Tar Heel on-line*, March 8, 2001, http://nc002.campusmotor.com/read_comments.html?ID=2548

¹⁶ Greg Koukl teaches this kind of questioning in *Tactics in Defending the Faith* (1-800-2-REASON)

it because it kills a human baby.” At that point, I merely repeat back their words. “Let me see if I got this straight. You oppose abortion because it kills babies, but you think it should be legal to kill babies?” Would these same people argue that while they personally opposed slavery, they would not protest if a neighbor wanted to own one? This was precisely what Stephen Douglas did during his debates with Abraham Lincoln.¹⁷ That argument did not work with slavery and it will not work with abortion.

Greg Koukl suggests this tactic: The next time somebody says that “you shouldn’t force your morality on me,” respond with only two words: “Why not?” Any answer given will be an example of that person forcing his morality on you!¹⁸

Mistake #2: Attack the person rather than refute the argument

Instead of defending the abortion act itself, some "pro-choice" advocates personally attack those who do not share their views. At a "Rock for Choice" concert in Pensacola Florida, vocalist Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam shrieked from the stage:

I'm usually good about my temper, but all these men trying to control women's bodies really piss me off. They're talking from a bubble. They're not talking from the street, and they're not in touch with what's real. Well, I'm f---ing mean, and I'm ugly, and my name is reality.¹⁹

He later said that unlike pro-life advocates, he would never force his beliefs on anyone. Meanwhile, during an HBO special, comedian Rosanne Barr told the audience:

You know who else I can't stand is them people that are antiabortion....I hate them. They're ugly, old, geeky, hideous men. They just don't want nobody to have an abortion, cause they want you to keep spitting out kids so they can molest them.²⁰

Do you see what is happening here? Instead of defending their views with facts and arguments, Rosanne Barr and Eddie Vedder are attacking the character of pro-lifers. We call this the *ad hominem* fallacy. It is fallacious reasoning because even if the personal attack is true, it does nothing to refute the pro-lifer's argument that the unborn are members of the human community. Suppose we grant that pro-life advocates are hideous old men who molest children, as Roseanne Barr contends is true. How does this in any way refute the pro-life claim that abortion takes the life of a defenseless child? Clearly, it does not. The attack is therefore irrelevant to the *argument* the pro-life advocate is making.

¹⁷ *The Lincoln Douglas Debates*, ed. R.W. Johannsen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) p. 27. See also *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), vol. III, pp. 256-7. Cited in Hadley Arkes, *First Things: An Inquiry into the First Principles of Morals and Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) p. 24.

¹⁸ Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl develop several tactics like this in, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). See also Koukl's "Tactics in Defending the Faith" available from Stand to Reason.

¹⁹ Cited in Kim Neely, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," *Rolling Stone*, May 5, 1994.

²⁰ Cited in Paul Duncan, "The Perils of Abortion," *Evangel*, January, 1995.

Unfair chastisement

Sometimes the personal attack comes from within the pro-life movement. Speaking at a pro-life convention in Alberta, a local cleric chastised right-to-lifers for being “the rudest people I have to deal with, and I don’t like it.”

Why are pro-lifers rude? Apparently they focus too narrowly on abortion when they ought to consider the broader "life issues" such as occupational safety, AIDS, poverty, and capital punishment. The result, the cleric said, is a "fractured Christian witness that hurts the cause."

The cleric is typical of many on the political left who insist that because pro-life advocates oppose the willful destruction of an innocent human being, they must therefore assume responsibility for all of society's ills. In other words, you are not truly pro-life unless you treat the deforestation of the Amazon with the same moral intensity that you do the unjust killing of a human fetus. This is careless thinking and highly unfair to those who take abortion seriously.

Imagine the gall of saying to the Canadian Cancer Society, "You have no right to focus on curing cancer unless you also work to cure AIDS, heart disease, and diabetes." Or, try telling the Canadian Heart and Lung Association, "You cannot reasonably oppose cardiac arrest unless you fund research aimed at stopping all loss of life." Ridiculous indeed, but how is this any different from what the cleric told pro-life advocates? Consider what he is demanding. Local pro-life groups must take their already scarce resources and spread them even thinner fighting every social injustice imaginable. This would be suicide for those opposed to abortion. As Frederick the Great once said, "He who attacks everywhere attacks nowhere."

Contrary to what some think, the abortion debate is not about poverty, capital punishment, the redistribution of wealth, or protection of the environment. It's about one issue: What is the unborn? The answer to that question trumps all other considerations. This is why secular objections to the pro-life view based on choice or privacy also miss the point entirely. Do we allow parents the choice to abuse children as long as they do so in the privacy of the home? Clearly, we don't. If the fetus is human, we should not harm it in the name of privacy anymore than we would a toddler.

In the final analysis, the cleric's remarks are not an outrage but a distraction. He sounds too much like secular critics who argue that right-to-lifers are hypocritical to oppose abortion unless they also adopt unwanted babies. Well, maybe we are and maybe we aren't, but how does my alleged unwillingness to adopt a child justify an abortionist killing one? Imagine how bizarre it would sound if I were to say, “Unless you agree to marry my wife, you have no right to oppose me mistreating her.” Or, “Unless you agree to adopt my toddler by noon tomorrow, I shall execute him.” Either way, if you reject my ultimatum, it does nothing to justify my evil treatment of innocent humans.²¹

²¹ For the record, there are two million families that want to adopt disabled and sick infants. See “Adoption Group Sets Record Straight About Abortion Film,” National Committee for Adoption press release, December 5, 1990.

Attacking pro-lifers for their speech

On July 11, 2000, a knife-wielding man attacked Vancouver (BC) abortionist Garson Romalis in a downtown clinic. Abortion advocacy groups seized on his brush with death to score cheap political points against their opponents, notably Canadian Alliance Party leader Stockwell Day, who opposes abortion.²²

Day was quick to condemn the attack against Romalis as “outrageous and untenable,” but that did not satisfy local abortion advocates. Marilyn Wilson, president of the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League, said Day had “indirectly sanctioned” the violence against Romalis with his extremist rhetoric.

Why was Mr. Day responsible for the attack? It’s really quite simple: He disagrees with Ms. Wilson on abortion and has said publicly that elective abortion is the unjust killing of an innocent human being. “Day is going to try and deny that he would support any violence,” she said in a press release, “but his rhetoric does incite other people who share his beliefs against abortion to violence.” She then called Day a “fanatic” for “the amount of anti-choice, extremist rhetoric that’s out there.”

Bear in mind that to Ms. Wilson, “fanatic” and “extremist” mean anyone who deviates in the slightest from her own position, which is that abortion should be legal for any reason whatsoever during all nine months of pregnancy. If you say that elective abortion takes the life of a defenseless child, as Day believes it does, your irresponsible rhetoric will cost an abortionist his life.

Ms. Wilson is using scaremongering tactics to poison the public debate over abortion. Her statements are intellectually dishonest for at least four reasons. First, let’s assume that pro-life rhetoric does in fact lead to acts of violence against abortionists (though there is no good reason to suppose that this is so). Would this in anyway refute the pro-life argument that elective abortion unjustly takes the life of an innocent human being? Keep in mind that pro-life advocates do not merely state their case; they buttress it with scientific and philosophic reasoning. If Ms. Wilson thinks we are wrong about the humanity of the unborn and the inhumanity of abortion, she should patiently explain why our arguments are mistaken and why fetuses should be disqualified from membership in the human community. But instead of refuting the pro-life view, she attempts to silence it with personal attacks.

Second, it is blatantly unfair of Ms. Wilson to demonize pro-life advocates for espousing their sincerely held beliefs. Let’s assume that I’m an animal rights activist opposed to the sale of fur. If a deranged environmentalist firebombs a local clothing store, am I responsible? More to the point, is Ms. Wilson responsible if, upon reading her press release, a pro-abortion activist shoots Stockwell Day for the purpose of saving the community from such an awful extremist? (In a press release one day prior to the stabbing, Wilson accused Mr. Day of favoring “state-sanctioned violence against women

²² The facts from this story, as well as some of the analysis, come from Andrew Coyne, “Opinions are not Crimes,” *The National Post*, July 14, 2000.

by forcing them to bear children they may not want.”²³) If she is serious that merely disagreeing with her on abortion is itself an incitement to violence, then let’s not fool around: Ms. Wilson should lead the charge to ban all pro-life speech. (Actually, she would like that, but lacks the courage to say so publicly.)

Third, it does not follow that because a lone extremist stabs an abortionist, the pro-life cause *itself* is unjust. Dr. Martin Luther King, for example, used strong language to condemn the evil of racism during the 1960s. In response to his peaceful but confrontational tactics, racists unjustly blamed him for the violent unrest that sometimes followed his public demonstrations. Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago argued that if Dr. King would stop exposing racial injustice, black people would be less likely to riot.²⁴ The Mayor’s remarks, like those of Ms. Wilson, were an outrage. Are we to believe that a handful of rioters made Dr. King’s crusade for civil rights entirely unjust?

In his *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*, King rebuts this dishonest attempt to change the subject:

In your statement you asserted that our actions, though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence....[I]t is immoral to urge an individual to withdraw his efforts to gain...basic constitutional rights because the quest precipitates violence....Non-violent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such a creative tension that a community...is forced to confront the issue. It seeks to dramatize the issue so it can be no longer ignored.

Fourth, if it is extreme to call elective abortion killing, then abortion advocates bear partial responsibility for the stabbing of Dr. Romalis. The fact is that pro-lifers aren’t the only ones who call abortion killing. Abortion-choice advocates do too:

- **Warren Hern**, late-term abortionist: *We have reached a point in this particular technology [D&E abortion] where there is no possibility of denial of an act of destruction by the operator. It is before one’s eyes. The sensations of dismemberment flow through the forceps like an electric current.*²⁵
- **Anthony Kennedy**, pro-abortion Supreme Court Associate Justice, describing common abortion techniques: *The fetus, in many cases, dies just as a human adult or child would: it bleeds to death as it is torn from limb to limb. . . . The fetus can be alive at the beginning of the dismemberment process and can survive for a time while its limbs are being torn off. . . . Dr. [Leroy] Carhart [the abortionist who challenged Nebraska’s partial-birth ban] has observed fetal heartbeat . . . with “extensive parts of the fetus removed,” . . . and testified that mere dismemberment of a limb does not always cause death because he knows of a physician who removed the arm of a fetus*

²³ Canadian Abortion Rights Action League press release, July 10, 2000.

²⁴ Gregg Cunningham, *Why Abortion is Genocide*, available from www.abortionno.org

²⁵ Warren Hern & Billie Corrigan, “What About Us? Staff Reactions to D&E,” paper presented at the annual meeting of Planned Parenthood Physicians, san Diego, CA, 1978.

only to have the fetus go on to be born “as a living child with one arm.” . . . At the conclusion of a D&E abortion . . . the abortionist is left with “a tray full of pieces.”²⁶

- **Planned Parenthood, 1963 brochure:** *Abortion kills the life of a baby after it has begun. It is dangerous to your life and health.*²⁷
- **New Mexico abortionist, 1993:** *Paradoxically, I have angry feelings at myself for feeling good about doing a technically good procedure which destroys a fetus, kills a baby.*²⁸
- **Abortionist Dr. Crist, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 2000:** *In testimony Wednesday in St. Louis Circuit Court, [abortionist] Crist said that it is not uncommon for second-trimester fetuses to leave the womb feet-first, intact and with their hearts still beating. He sometimes crushes their skulls to get the fetuses out. Other times, he dismembers them.*²⁹

My question for Ms. Wilson and abortion-advocates who think like her is this: If calling abortion “killing” makes one responsible for acts of violence against doctors, are pro-abortionists like Warren Hern and Anthony Kennedy guilty of inciting violence against their own people? Like pro-life advocates, they candidly admit that abortion is brutal killing. Therefore, when Dr. Hern complains about threats to abortion doctors, is he partially to blame for his own insecurity? Put simply pro-abortion advocates like Ms. Wilson lack the courage to defend their views publicly. Instead of refuting the scientific and philosophic case for the pro-life view, they call names from a distance in hopes of silencing their critics. There is a name for this—fascism. Pro-lifers take heart: Our critics have truly run out of ideas.

A crass form of reverse sexism

Finally, some pro-life advocates are attacked for their gender. Men are told, “You can't get pregnant, so leave the abortion issue to women.” Besides its obvious sexism, the statement is seriously flawed for several reasons. First, arguments do not have genders, people do.³⁰ Since many pro-life women use the same arguments offered by pro-life men, it behooves the abortion advocate to answer these arguments without fallaciously attacking a person's gender.

Second, to be consistent with their own reasoning, abortion advocates would have to concede that *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court case legalizing abortion, was bad law. After all, nine men decided it. They must also call for the dismissal of all male lawyers

²⁶ *Stenberg v. Carhart*, 2000. Cited in David Smolin, *et al*, “The Supreme Court 2000: A Symposium,” *First Things*, October 2000. Kennedy voted to uphold *Roe v. Wade* in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992).

²⁷ “Plan Your Children for Health and Happiness,” Planned Parenthood Brochure, 1961.

²⁸ Cited in Diane Gianelli, “Abortion Providers Share Inner Conflicts,” *American Medical News*, July 12, 1993

²⁹ Jo Mannies, “Abortion Doctor Gives Graphic testimony Describing Abortion Procedure,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 25, 2000.

³⁰ Beckwith, *Politically Correct Death*, p. 90.

working for Planned Parenthood and the ACLU on abortion related issues. Since abortion advocates are unwilling to do this, we can restate their argument as follows: “No man can speak on abortion—unless he agrees with us.” Once again, this is a classic case of intolerance.

Third, lesbians and post-menopausal women cannot naturally get pregnant; must they be silent on the issue? Think of the bizarre rules we could derive from this argument: "Since only generals understand battle, only they should discuss the morality of war." Or, "Because female sportscasters have never experienced a groin injury, they have no right to broadcast football games on national television."

Again, abortion advocates must offer arguments to support their position. Attacking people personally, even if those attacks are true, will not make their case or refute ours.

Mistake #3: Assume what you are trying to prove

Advocates of elective abortion must show that the unborn are not fully human for their case to succeed.³¹ But instead of proving this conclusion with facts and arguments, many people simply assume it within the course of their rhetoric. We call this "begging the question" and it's a logical fallacy that lurks behind many arguments for abortion.

A person begs the question when he assumes what he is trying to prove. Suppose federal prosecutors confronted you with this question: “Have you stopped cheating on your taxes?” Obviously, the question is unfair. It assumes that you have broken the law, which is in fact the very point prosecutors are trying to prove. Your defense attorney would be outraged, insisting that they prove guilt with facts and evidence, rather than assume it with rhetoric.

Arguing that abortion is justified because a woman has a right to control her own body assumes there is only one body involved—that of the woman. But this is precisely the point abortion advocates try to prove. Hence, they beg the question. Or, take the claim that no one knows when life begins, therefore abortion should remain legal. But to argue that no one knows when life begins, and that abortion must remain legal through all nine months of pregnancy, assumes that life does not begin until birth—the exact point abortion advocates try to prove. This is hardly a neutral position. It is a clear case of begging the question.

So is the coat-hanger/back-alley argument, which states that women will once again be forced to procure dangerous illegal abortions if laws are passed protecting the unborn. Besides, we are told, the law can't stop all abortions, so why not keep the practice legal? But unless you begin with the assumption that the unborn are not human, you are making the highly questionable claim that because some people will die attempting to kill others,

³¹ True, a small number of abortion advocates at the academic level (most notably, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Eileen McDonagh, and David Boonin) bite the bullet and concede for the sake of discussion that the unborn are in fact human, but that abortion is justified anyway. I do not find their arguments persuasive and I have dealt with them elsewhere.

the state should make it safe and legal for them to do so. Why should the law be faulted for making it tougher for one human being to take the life of another, completely innocent one? Should we legalize bank robbery so it is safer for felons? As abortion advocate Mary Anne Warren points out, "The fact that restricting access to abortion has tragic side effects does not, in itself, show that the restrictions are unjustified, since murder is wrong regardless of the consequences of forbidding it."³² Again, the issue isn't safety. The issue is the status of the unborn.

(To digress for a moment, the objection that the law cannot stop all abortions is silly. Laws cannot stop all rape—should we legalize rape? The fact is that laws against abortion, like laws against rape, drastically reduce its occurrence. Prior to *Roe v. Wade* (1973), there were at most 210,000 illegal abortions per year while more conservative estimates suggest an average of 89,000 per year. Within seven years of legalization, abortion totals jumped to over 1.5 million annually!³³ True, no law can stop ALL illegal behavior, but that's not the point. At issue is the status of the unborn: Are they human beings? If so, we should legally protect them the way we would any other group that is unjustly harmed. Also silly is the claim that women are "forced" into having illegal abortions. Women aren't forced to have illegal abortions; they choose to have them. As Greg Koukl points out, "A woman is no more forced into the back alley when abortion is outlawed than a young man is forced to rob banks because the state won't put him on welfare. Both have other options."³⁴ Finally, the claim thousands died annually from back-alley abortions prior to 1973—when *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in the U.S.—is just plain false. Dr. Mary Calderone, former medical director for Planned Parenthood, wrote in 1960 that illegal abortions were performed safely by physicians in good standing in their communities. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control report 39 women died from illegal abortion in 1972, the year prior to legalization, not 5,000 to 10,000 as claimed by abortion advocates for each year prior to *Roe*.)

In short, if you think a particular argument begs the question regarding the status of the unborn, simply ask if this justification for abortion also works as a justification for killing toddlers or other humans. If not, the argument assumes the unborn are not fully human. Again, it may be the case that the unborn are not fully human and abortion is therefore justified. But this must be argued with evidence, not merely assumed by one's rhetoric.

Mistake #4: Confuse human value with human function

Abortion advocates like Mary Anne Warren claim that a "person" is a living entity with feelings, self-awareness, consciousness, and the ability to interact with his or her environment. Because a human fetus has none of these capabilities, it's not a person.³⁵

³² Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," in *The Problem of Abortion*, Joel Feinberg, ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1984) p.103.

³³ For a study on estimates prior to legalization, see Thomas Hilgers, et al, "An Objective Model for Estimating Criminal Abortions and Its Implications for Public Policy," in *New Perspectives on Human Abortion*, ed. Thomas Hilgers (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1981) p. 78.

³⁴ Greg Koukl, "I'm Pro-Choice," available at www.str.org.

³⁵ Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion."

Warren makes two assumptions here, neither of which she defends. First, she doesn't say why should anyone accept the idea that there can be such a thing as a human being that is not a human person. What's the difference? I've never met a human that wasn't a person, have you? Second, even if Warren is correct about the distinction between human being and human person, she fails to tell us *why* a person must possess self-awareness and consciousness in order to qualify as fully human. In other words, she merely *asserts* that these traits are necessary for personhood but never says why these alleged value-giving properties are value-giving in the first place.

In his article "Why Libertarians Should be Pro-Choice Regarding Abortion," Libertarian philosopher Jan Narveson makes points similar to Warren.³⁶ His larger purpose is to tell us who is and is not a subject of libertarian rights. He argues that humans have value (and hence, rights) not in virtue of the kind of thing they are (members of a natural kind or species), but only because of an acquired property, in this case, the immediate capacity to make conscious, deliberate choices. Because fetuses lack this acquired property, they have no rights. A woman's choice to abort, then, does not negatively effect the fetus or deny it any fundamental liberties.

But this can't be right. Newborns, like fetuses, lack the immediate capacity to make conscious, deliberate choices, so what's wrong with infanticide?³⁷ What *principled* reason can Narveson give for saying, "No, you can't do that?"

Peter Singer in *Practical Ethics* bites the bullet and says there is none, that arguments used to justify abortion work equally well to justify infanticide.³⁸ Abortion-advocates Michael Tooley and Mary Anne Warren agree. For example, if the immediate capacity for self-consciousness makes one valuable as a subject of rights, and newborns like fetuses lack that immediate capacity, it follows that fetuses and newborns are both disqualified. You can't draw an arbitrary line at birth and spare newborns. Hence, infanticide, like abortion, is morally permissible.

Lincoln raised a similar point with slavery, noting that any argument used to disqualify blacks as subjects of rights works equally well to disqualify many whites.

You say 'A' is white and 'B' is black. It is color, then: the lighter having the right to enslave the darker? Take care. By this rule, you are a slave to the first man you meet with a fairer skin than your own.

You do not mean color exactly—You mean the whites are intellectually the superiors of the blacks, and therefore have the right to enslave them? Take care again: By this rule you are to be a slave to the first man you meet with an intellect superior to your own.

³⁶ Article is posted on Narveson's website at <http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~jnarveso/abortion.htm>

³⁷ Conor Liston & Jerome Kagan, "Brain Development: Memory Enhancement in Early Childhood," *Nature* 419, 896 (2002). See also O'Rahilly, Ronand and Muller, Pabiola, *Human Embryology and Teratology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley-Liss, 1996) p. 8.

³⁸ Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997) pp. 169-171.

But you say it is a question of interest, and, if you can make it your interest, you have the right to enslave another. Very well. And if he can make it his interest, he has the right to enslave you.³⁹

In short, if humans have value only because of some acquired property like skin color or self-consciousness and not in virtue of the kind of thing they are, then it follows that since these acquired properties come in varying degrees, basic human rights come in varying degrees. Do we really want to say that those with more self-consciousness are more human (and valuable) than those with less? As Lee and George point out, this relegates the proposition that all men are created equal to the ash heap of history.⁴⁰

Philosophically, it's far more reasonable to argue that although humans differ immensely with respect to talents, accomplishments, and degrees of development, they are nonetheless equal because they share a common human nature. Humans have value simply because they are human, not because of some acquired property that they may gain or lose during their lifetimes. If you deny this, it's difficult to say why objective human rights apply to anyone.

Natural rights versus legal (positive) rights

Put differently, pro-life advocates, echoing Lincoln, argue that we must distinguish between *natural* rights and *legal* ones. Natural rights are those rights that you have simply because you are human. They are grounded in your human nature and you have them from the moment you begin to exist.⁴¹ For example, you have a natural right not to be harmed without justification as well as a natural right not to be convicted of a crime without a fair trial. Government does not grant these basic rights. Rather, government's role is to protect them. In contrast, legal (or positive) rights are those rights you can only acquire through accomplishment or maturity. These rights originate from the government and include the right to vote at your eighteenth birthday and a right to drive on your sixteenth. But your *natural* right to live was there all along. It comes to be when you come to be.

To cash this out further, I do not have a legal (positive) right to vote in the next Canadian election for the simple reason that I am not a Canadian citizen. But just because I lack the right to vote in Canada does not mean I lack the right to basic protections whenever I visit that country. Likewise, just because a fetus may not have the positive right to drive a car or vote in the next election does not mean he lacks the *natural* right not to be harmed without justification. Elective abortion unjustly robs the unborn of his or her natural right to life, as Hadley Arkes explains:

No one would suggest that a fetus could have a claim to fill the Chair of Logic at one of our universities; and we would not wish quite yet to seek its advice on anything

³⁹ *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (Rutgers University Press, 1953) vol. II, p. 222.

⁴⁰ Robert P. George, "Cloning Addendum," *National Review on-Line*, July 15, 2002; Patrick Lee, "Human Embryos and Fetuses are Subjects of Rights." (See note #2 above.)

⁴¹ Hadley Arkes, *Natural Rights and the Right to Choose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp. 13-14.

important; and we should probably not regard him as eligible to vote in any state other than Massachusetts. All of these rights and privileges would be inappropriate to the condition or attributes of the fetus. But nothing that renders him unqualified for these special rights would diminish in any way the most elementary right that could be claimed for any human being, or even for an animal: the right not to be killed without the rendering of reasons that satisfy the strict standards of “justification.”⁴²

Do women have a natural (fundamental) right to abort?

Secular liberals insist that abortion is a fundamental human right the State should not infringe upon. In reply, I borrow a question from Hadley Arkes and ask, “Where did that right to an abortion come from?” In other words, is it a natural right that springs from our nature as human beings or is it a positive (legal) right granted by government? If the latter, the abortion advocate cannot really complain that she is wronged if the State does not permit her to abort. After all, the same government that grants rights can take them away.

On the other hand, if the right to an abortion is a natural right—a right one has in virtue of being human—then the abortion-advocate had that right from the moment she came to be, that is, from conception!⁴³ Thus, we are left with this amusing paradox: According to the logic of many abortion-advocates, unborn women do not have a right to life while in the womb but they do have a right to an abortion! Absurd! In short, liberals cannot tell us where rights come from or why anyone should have them. As Arkes points out, they have talked themselves out of the very natural rights upon which their freedoms are built.

Mistake #5: Disguise your true position by appealing to the hard cases

Some people argue that legal abortion protects rape victims from compulsory motherhood. They castigate pro-lifers as cruel and insensitive toward women suffering from sexual assault. This seems like a powerful objection, as nearly everyone understands that rape is profoundly evil. Victims of this heinous crime deserve our best care.

But there’s a moral consideration as well. How should a civil society treat innocent human beings that remind us of a painful event? May we kill them so that we can feel better? Put differently, can you think of any other case where, having been victimized yourself, you can justly turn around and victimize another completely innocent person?

If the unborn is a human being, she should not be killed to benefit her mother. Hardship does not justify homicide. Hence, we are back to the one question that trumps all others in the abortion debate: What is the unborn?

⁴² Hadley Arkes, *First Things: An Inquiry into the First Principles of Morals and Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) p. 366.

⁴³ Hadley Arkes develops this paradox in detail in *Natural Rights and the Right to Choose*. I owe the observation to his excellent analysis.

Hidden agendas

But the appeal to hard cases is flawed in another way that has nothing to do with one's attitude toward women or the morality of abortion. It is flawed because it's misleading.

Here's why. The "pro-choice" position is not that abortion should be legal only when a woman is raped, but that abortion is a fundamental right she can exercise for any reason she wants during all nine months of pregnancy. Instead of defending this position with facts and arguments, many disguise it with an emotional appeal to rape. But this will not make their case. The argument from rape, if successful at all, would only justify abortion in cases of sexual assault, not for any reason the woman deems fit. In fact, arguing for abortion-on-demand from the hard case of rape is like trying to argue for the elimination of all traffic laws because you might have to break one rushing a child to the hospital.⁴⁴

To expose their smokescreen, I ask abortion advocates the following: "Okay, I'm going to grant for the sake of discussion that we keep abortion legal in cases of rape. Will you join me in supporting legal restrictions on those abortions done for the convenience of the mother?"⁴⁵ The answer is almost always no, to which I reply, "Then why did you bring up rape in the first place? Were you trying to disguise your own extreme view that abortion should be legal for any reason whatsoever?"

Again, if abortion-advocates think that abortion should be a legal choice for all nine months of pregnancy for any reason whatsoever, including sex-selection and convenience, they should defend that view with facts and arguments. Exploiting the tragedy of rape victims is intellectually dishonest.

Summary and Conclusion

Again, this is not a debate about privacy or trusting women to make their own responsible choices. Does the right to make one's own responsible choices include the rights of parents to abuse children in the privacy of the home? Therefore, if the unborn are human like other children, killing them in the name of privacy is a clear moral wrong. As I have shown, this debate is about one question: What is the unborn? Everything comes back to that one question.

Let me be clear. I am vigorously "pro-choice" when it comes to women choosing a number of moral goods. I support a woman's right to choose her own health care provider, to choose her own school, to choose her own husband, to choose her own job, to choose her own religion, and to choose her own career, to name a few. These are among the many choices that I fully support for the women of our country. But some choices are wrong, like killing innocent human beings simply because they are in the way and cannot defend themselves. No, we shouldn't be allowed to choose that.

⁴⁴ Beckwith uses this example in *Politically Correct Death*, p. 69.

⁴⁵ Warren Hern, *Abortion Practice*, (Philadelphia: J. Lipponcott, 1990) pp. 10, 39. Dr. Hern is America's leading abortionist and he writes, "The impression of clinical staff is that all but a few women seek abortions for reasons that can broadly be defined as socioeconomic, and many cite strictly economic reasons." (*Abortion Practice*, p.10)

Sadly, opponents of the pro-life view believe that human beings that are in the wrong location or have the wrong level of development do not deserve the protection of law. They assert, without justification, the belief that strong and independent people deserve the protection of law while small and dependent people do not. This view is elitist and exclusive. It violates the principle that once made political liberalism great: a basic commitment to protect the most vulnerable members of the human community.

We can do better than that. In the past, we used to discriminate on the basis of skin color and gender, but now, with elective abortion, we discriminate on the basis of size, level of development, location, and degree of dependency. We've simply exchanged one form of bigotry for another.

In sharp contrast, the position I have defended is that no human being, regardless of size, level of development, race, gender, or place of residence, should be excluded from the moral community of human persons. In other words, the pro-life view of humanity is inclusive, indeed wide open, to all, especially those that are small, vulnerable and defenseless.⁴⁶

Remember: The absence of consensus does not mean the absence of truth. People once disagreed about slavery, racism and genocide, but that did not make them complex issues.⁴⁷ Nor did it mean that there were no right answers.

Today, the moral question of abortion can be answered by asking one question: What is the unborn? Once that question is answered, moral clarity is possible. Whether we shall have the courage to pursue moral clarity remains to be seen.

Review Questions:

- Pro-life advocates contend that elective abortion unjustly takes the life of a defenseless human being. They defend this claim two ways. What are they?
- What does the SLED acronym stand for? How is it used to affirm the pro-life view?
- What's the difference between a preference claim and a moral one? When someone says, "That's just your view," what mistake are they making?
- When someone says, "You shouldn't force your views on me," what are they doing to you? What two-word reply should you politely offer in return?
- What are relativism's three fatal flaws?
- Why are the claims "men can't speak on abortion" and "you have no right to oppose abortion unless you adopt babies" flawed?
- What's wrong with the claim that self-awareness determines human value? How does this damage the idea of human equality and dignity?
- How do natural human rights differ from legal rights? When do they come to be?
- Why is the appeal to rape both flawed and misleading?

⁴⁶ I'm indebted to Frank Beckwith for the wording of this paragraph.

⁴⁷ Peter Kreeft, "Human Personhood," *ALL About Issues*, January-February, 1992, p. 29.

Projects to Enhance Learning:

- Conduct a brief campus survey with the following questions. Do not debate those who participate; simply ask the questions and record the answers.
 1. Do you believe that morals (what's right and what's wrong) are real things or do we just make them up for ourselves?
 2. Consider the following two statements: A) It is wrong to torture toddlers for fun. B) It is wrong to rape women for fun. How do they differ from the claim, "chocolate ice-cream is better than vanilla?"
 3. Do you think that the terrorists who flew airplanes into the World Trade Center were evil or did they just have preferences different from our own?
 4. People once disagreed on slavery: Some thought it was wrong while others thought it was perfectly fine. Was slavery wrong even though people disagreed?
 5. People today disagree on the issue of abortion. What is the best way to get at the truth and resolve the matter?
 6. Pro-life advocates claim the elective abortion is wrong because it unjustly takes the life of a defenseless human being. How does this claim differ from saying that you like chocolate ice-cream rather than vanilla?

Once you have the data, use the questions below to write a two-page summary of your findings. Then, distribute the summary to at least five youth pastors near you.

- (1) Do those surveyed see the difference between moral claims and preference ones?
- (2) In what ways, if any, did people give conflicting answers to the questions?
- (3) What's the best way to reach people who think moral truth is just a preference, like choosing your favorite ice cream?

- Study the following tolerance statement from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice then write a two-page reply, which you will email to the organization. Be prepared to explain why the organization's statement is 1) not tolerant of other views, 2) self-refuting, 3) not morally neutral (i.e., why it actually takes a position while claiming not to). Explain further why the "pro-choice" view in general cannot account for basic human dignity/equality and why the mere fact that people disagree tells us nothing about whether abortion is right or wrong.

Pro-choice clergy honor the value and dignity of all human life and recognize that different religious traditions have different views regarding the beginning of life. Because of these honest differences, they believe no one religious philosophy should govern the law for all Americans. (www.rerc.org)

Web Sources for Further Study:

- Maureen L. Condic, “Life: Defining the Beginning by the End”
<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0305/articles/condic.html>
- Robert P. George, “Cloning Addendum”
<http://www.nationalreview.com/document/document071602.asp>
- Diane Irving, “When Do Human Beings Begin?”
<http://www.archindy.org/prolife/dirvingbeginning.htm>
- Greg Koukl, “Relativism Self-Destructs”
<http://www.str.org/free/commentaries/apologetics/relativism/reselfd.htm>
- Greg Koukl, “Relativism Interview w/ Summit Ministries”
http://www.str.org/free/solid_ground/SG9809.htm
- Paul Copan, “Who are You to Judge Others? A Defense of Making Moral Judgements”
<http://www.paulcopan.com/articles/who-are-you-to-judge.html>

Book / Tape Resources for Further Study:

- Francis J. Beckwith and Gregory Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998)
- Hadley Arkes, *Natural Rights and the Right to Choose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Scott Klusendorf and Greg Koukl, *Making Abortion Unthinkable: The Art of Pro-Life Persuasion* (Stand to Reason Press, 2002) Order at www.str.org
- Greg Koukl, “Tactics in Defending the Faith,” order from Stand to Reason at 1-800-2-REASON or www.str.org
- Peter Kreeft, *The Unaborted Socrates: A Dramatic Debate on the Issues Surrounding Abortion* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983)
- Paul Copan, *True for You, But Not for Me: Deflating the Slogans That Leave Christians Speechless* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998).
- Paul Copan, *That's Just Your Interpretation: Responding to Skeptics Who Challenge Your Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

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