

# Summary of the Pro-Life Argument

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Scott Klusendorf

## I. Review of the Basic Pro-Life Argument:

### A. Definition and ground rules:

1. Abortion defined (Kaczor): The intentional killing of a human fetus. This definition begs no questions and is affirmed by many on both sides of the debate.<sup>1</sup>
2. Ground rules: There is no such thing as a “woman’s perspective” on abortion that trumps all rational inquiries into the subject. Indeed, feminists, let alone women in general, have no single perspective on the issue. Gender is irrelevant. It is arguments that must be advanced and defended.

### B. Pro-life syllogism:

P1: It is wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being.

P2: Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being.

Therefore,

C: Abortion is morally wrong.

## II. Scientific support for the pro-life argument:

- A. The science of embryology establishes that from the earliest stages of development, the unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings. True, they have yet to grow and mature, but they are whole human beings nonetheless. Leading embryology textbooks affirm this.<sup>2</sup> For example, in *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology* Keith L. Moore & T.V.N. Persaud write: “A zygote is the beginning of a new human being. Human development begins at fertilization, the process during which a male gamete or sperm...unites with a female gamete or oocyte...to form a single cell called a zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marks the beginning of each of us as a unique individual.” T.W. Sadler’s *Langman’s Embryology* states: “The development of a human begins with fertilization, a process by which the spermatozoon from the male and the oocyte from the female unite to give rise to a new organism, the zygote.” Embryologists Ronan O’Rahilly and Fabiola Müller write, “Although life is a continuous process, fertilization is a critical landmark because, under ordinary circumstances, a new, genetically distinct human organism is thereby formed.”

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Kaczor, *The Ethics of Abortion: Women’s rights, Human Life, and the Question of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2011) p.8.

<sup>2</sup> 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* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1998), pp. 2-18. O’Rahilly, Ronan and Muller, Pabiola, *Human Embryology and Teratology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley-Liss, 1996) pp. 8, 29.

B. That elective abortion kills a living human fetus is conceded by many who perform and defend the practice:

1. Dr. Warren Hern, author of *Abortion Practice*—to a Planned Parenthood conference: “We have reached a point in this particular technology [D&E abortion] where there is no possibility of denying an act of destruction. It is before one’s eyes. The sensations of dismemberment flow through the forceps like an electric current.”<sup>3</sup>
2. Editorial in *California Medicine*, 9/70—“Since the old ethic has not yet been fully displaced it has been necessary to separate the idea of abortion from the idea of killing, which continues to be socially abhorrent. The result has been a curious avoidance of the scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception and is continuous whether intra-or extra-uterine until death. The very considerable semantic gymnastics which are required to rationalize abortion as anything but taking a human life would be ludicrous if they were not often put forth under socially impeccable auspices. It is suggested that this schizophrenic sort of subterfuge is necessary because while a new ethic is being accepted the old one has not yet been rejected.”<sup>4</sup>
3. Ronald Dworkin, in *Life’s Dominion*—Abortion deliberately kills a developing embryo and is a choice for death.<sup>5</sup>
4. Faye Wattleton, former President of Planned Parenthood—“I think we have deluded ourselves into believing that people don’t know that abortion is killing. So any pretense that abortion is not killing is a signal of our ambivalence, a signal that we cannot say yes, it kills a fetus.”<sup>6</sup>
5. Naomi Wolf, a prominent feminist author and abortion supporter, in *The New Republic*—“Clinging to a rhetoric about abortion in which there is no life and no death, we entangle our beliefs in a series of self-delusions, fibs and evasions. And we risk becoming precisely what our critics charge us with being: callous, selfish and casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of human life...we need to contextualize the fight to defend abortion rights within a moral framework that admits that the death of a fetus is a real death.”<sup>7</sup>
6. Camille Paglia, feminist—“Hence I have always frankly admitted that abortion is murder, the extermination of the powerless by the powerful. Liberals for the most part have shrunk from facing the ethical consequences of their embrace of abortion,

<sup>3</sup> Paper presented at the 1978 meeting of the Association of Planned Parenthood Physicians, October 26.  
<http://www.drhern.com/pdfs/staffrx.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> “A New Ethic for Medicine and Society,” *California Medicine*, September 1970.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Dworkin, *Life’s Dominion: An Argument About Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom* (New York: Vintage, 1994) p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Faye Wattleton, “Speaking Frankly,” *Ms.*, May / June 1997, Volume VII, Number 6, 67.

<sup>7</sup> Naomi Wolf, “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” *The New Republic*, October 16, 1995, 26

which results in the annihilation of concrete individuals and not just clumps of insensate tissue.”<sup>8</sup>

7. Anthony Kennedy, Supreme Court Justice and abortion supporter—“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 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.”<sup>9</sup>

### III. Philosophical Grounding for the Pro-Life View—Humans Are Equal by Nature not Function

- A. Key philosophical question: Given the humanity of the unborn, does each and every human being have an equal right to life or do only some have it in virtue of some characteristic that none of us share equally and which may come and go within the course of our lifetimes?
- B. Pro-life advocates contend there is no morally significant difference between the embryo you once were and the adult you are today that would justify killing you at that earlier stage of development. Differences of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency are not good reasons for saying you had no right to life then but you do now. Stephen Schwarz suggests the acronym SLED as a helpful reminder of these non-essential differences:

Size: You were smaller as an embryo, but since when does your body size determine value?

Level of Development: True, you were less developed as an embryo, but six-month olds are less developed than teenagers physically and mentally, but we don’t think we can kill them.

Environment: Where you are has no bearing on what you are. How does a journey of eight inches down the birth canal change the essential nature of the unborn from a being we can kill to one we can’t?

Degree of Dependency: Sure, you depended on your mother for survival, but since when does dependence on another human mean we can kill you? (Consider conjoined twins, for example.)

- C. In short, humans are equal by nature not function. Although they differ immensely in their respective degrees of development, they are nonetheless equal because they share

<sup>8</sup> Camille Paglia, “Fresh Blood for the Vampire,” *Salon*, September 10, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> *Stenberg v. Carhart*, 2000.

a common human nature—and they had that human nature from the moment they began to exist. If I am wrong about that, human equality is a fiction. Think, for a moment, about your 10 closest friends. Would you agree that each of them has the same basic rights and that each should be treated equally? But if all of them should be treated equally, there must be some quality they all have equally that justifies that equal treatment. What is that characteristic? Only this: We all have the same human nature. And you got that human nature the moment you began to exist.

D. Objection: “The unborn are human, but they are not persons.”

E. Reply—

1. Why should anyone think there can be such a thing as a human who is not a person? Idling beneath the assertion is body-self dualism. According to body-self dualism, the real you is not your body, which is mere matter in motion. The real you is your thoughts, aims, desires, conscious decisions, capacity to reason, and capacity for relationships.
2. Personhood Theory applies body-self dualism to law and ethics. Personhood Theory says being human isn’t enough to ground your right to life. Only “persons” have that right—that is, those who achieve a certain level of cognitive functioning. Lose that function and your right to life no longer applies. In short, we are left with two classes of human beings: human non-persons we can kill and human persons we can’t. If you don’t make the grade, your rights can be overridden by the interests of actual persons.
3. Personhood theory grounded in body-self dualism is deeply problematic:
  - (a) Body-self dualism is subjective. When personhood is detached from the living human body, human value is entirely subjective. Who decides which traits matter? Might makes right. Those making the rules decide if your life is worth living.
  - (b) Body-self dualism is counterintuitive. If pressed, you are forced to say things like, “My body existed before I did” or “I was mere matter until my conscious self showed up.” You must also admit that you’ve never hugged your mother since one cannot hug desires, thoughts, and aims. And if you’re a psychologist, don’t even think of curing multiple personality disorders. That would entail mass murder, given multiple personalities—each with separate aims, desires, and thoughts—are intentionally destroyed in treatment. At bottom, body-self dualism cannot explain simple statements like “you see.” Sensory acts like seeing involve bodily acts (via the eyes) and intellectual acts (via the mind). Both are inextricably wound up in human nature.
  - (c) Body-self dualism cannot account for human equality. Does each and every human being have an equal right to life or do only some have it in virtue of some characteristic which may come and go within the course of their lifetimes? If an arbitrarily selected trait like self-awareness grounds fundamental human

value, and we don't share that trait equally, those with more of it have a greater right to life than those with less. Human equality is a myth.

- (d) Body-self dualism distorts human "dignity." Abortion-choice advocates confuse *intrinsic* dignity, which we have in virtue of our common human nature, with *attributed* dignity, which we earn through achievement or performance. As Christopher Kaczor points out, the beach bum and the university scholar are both equal in their fundamental intrinsic dignity. However, they differ in their attributed dignity.
- (e) Body-self dualism provides a philosophical foundation for intentionally killing innocent human beings outside the womb and justifies involuntary euthanasia and involuntary organ donation. That is, if the rights of a cognitively disabled patient can be overridden by the interests of actual persons, what's wrong with intentionally killing him to benefit others? Given the logic of personhood theory, there is no theoretical ground for opposing such killing. If that weren't bad enough, on personhood theory, cognitively disabled humans could—and perhaps, should be—used for organ harvesting that benefits actual "persons." To borrow an example from Frank Beckwith, Suppose a surgeon alters the brain of a developing fetus so he or she never attains self-awareness. At age five, the child is killed to provide organs for actual, self-aware people. On theoretical grounds, how is this wrong? I'm not making this stuff up. Jeff McMahan and Carol Kahn suggest creating "body clones"—brain-altered bodies cultivated for rejection-free body parts. The medical journal *Lancet* opines that unconscious people should be lethally injected so their organs can be harvested.

- 4. Pro-life advocates have a better foundation for human dignity. Instead of setting aside an entire class of human beings to be killed because they don't measure up, we say that all humans have an equal right to life regardless of size, development, cognitive function, or dependency. In other words, our view is inclusive, indeed, wide open to all.

**1-Minute Soundbite:** "I am pro-life because the science of embryology establishes that from the earliest stages of development, you were a distinct, living, and whole human being. You weren't part of another human being like skin cells on the back of my hand, you were already a whole living member of the human family even though you had yet to mature. And there is no essential difference between the embryo you once were and the adult you are today that justifies killing you at that earlier stage of development. Differences of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency are not good reasons for saying you could be killed then but not now."

### **Reading List to Help You Master the Pro-Life Argument:**

- Peter Kreeft, *The Unaborted Socrates: A Dramatic Debate on the Issues Surrounding Abortion* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983)
- Scott Klusendorf, *The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009)
- Greg Koukl, *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009)

- Francis J. Beckwith and Greg Koukl, *Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997)
- Francis J. Beckwith, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- Christopher Kaczor, *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life, and the Question of Justice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015)
- Christopher Kaczor, *A Defense of Dignity: Creating Life, Destroying Life, and the Protecting of the Rights of Conscience* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013)
- Patrick Lee, *Abortion and Unborn Human Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010)
- Hadley Arkes, *Natural Rights and the Right to Choose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)
- Hadley Arkes, *First Things: An Inquiry Into the First Principles of Morals and Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986)
- Stephen Schwarz, *The Moral Question of Abortion* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990)
- Trent Horn, *Persuasively Pro-Life: How to Talk About Our Culture's Toughest Issue* (El Cajon: Catholic Answers, 2014)
- Dave Sterrett, *Aborting Aristotle: Examining Fatal Fallacies in the Abortion Debate* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2015)
- Robert P. George & Christopher Tollefsen, *Embryo: A Defense of Human Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Princeton: The Witherspoon Institute, 2011).
- Ramesh Ponnuru, *The Party of Death: The Democrats, the Media, the Courts, and the Disregard for Human Life* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2006)