

- SECOND EDITION -

Foreword by Lila Rose

THE
CASE
FOR

LIFE

Equipping

Christians to Engage

the Culture

Scott Klusendorf

“With the United States Supreme Court’s *Dobbs* ruling, we need Scott Klusendorf’s resource more than ever. He answers the question, *Who are the unborn?* with clear-minded thinking and carefully crafted arguments. Pro-life laypeople and lawmakers alike must come to the street corner or statehouse equipped to speak in defense of their unborn brothers and sisters. Klusendorf keeps the reader’s eye and heart fixed on the center of the pro-life position: the child in the womb.”

Todd Wilken, Host, *Issues, Etc.*

“Way too many people today are silent on abortion—not because they don’t care, but because they do not know how to make the case for life that they hold dear in their hearts. Scott Klusendorf does an amazing job equipping us to engage a culture of death toward a culture of life. The days of being silent about the truth that we know biblically and scientifically should not cause us to take a back seat anymore. We cannot use the excuse that we did not know.”

Valerie Millsapps, CEO, Pregnancy Resource Center

“For years I’ve trusted Scott Klusendorf and his team to teach the pro-life argument to every single student who attends a Summit Ministries course. The reason is simply stated in the logical syllogism Klusendorf shares: ‘It is always wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being. Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being. Therefore, abortion is morally wrong.’ Every human being has value. Clear thinking about this opens the way to clear thinking about everything else. *The Case for Life* encapsulates decades of wisdom from Klusendorf’s frontline defense of the pro-life cause. It is at the same time encyclopedic and fascinating, bringing the science, philosophy, and theology within reach through powerful illustrations and practical ‘how-to’ ideas for sharing the truth even with die-hard skeptics. This will be my go-to pro-life book from this point forward.”

Jeff Myers, President, Summit Ministries

“No one has had a greater impact teaching me the skills of defending the precious lives of unborn children than Scott Klusendorf. He is simply a master of his craft. If you want a single tutorial giving you everything you need to help make a mother’s womb the safest place for a child to be instead of the most dangerous place, read *The Case for Life*.”

Gregory Koukl, President, Stand to Reason; author, *Tactics* and *The Story of Reality*

“Scott Klusendorf’s *The Case for Life* is the single greatest pro-life apologetics book available from an evangelical author. I use it in my classes and strongly endorse it. It’s accessible in how it reads, comprehensive in its argument, and intellectually satisfying in making a definitive case for protecting human life at all stages. Klusendorf is to be commended for making high-level bioethical issues simple and grounding his argument in the complementary sources of Scripture and natural law. With *Roe* now in the ash heap of history, it was time for *The Case for Life* to be expanded and updated. Here it is.”

Andrew T. Walker, Associate Professor of Christian Ethics, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Fellow, The Ethics and Public Policy Center

“The first edition of *The Case for Life* was the best pro-life apologetics resource on my shelf, and Scott Klusendorf has achieved something I didn’t think was possible—he’s made it better! His voluminous understanding of the abortion issue, coupled with his clear thinking and apologetical acumen, will equip you to answer every pro-abortion argument that the other side offers. This is an essential resource for anyone who engages others on the life issue. Whether you’re new to pro-life apologetics or a seasoned veteran in the field, you will benefit from this book.”

Jim Osman, Pastor, Kootenai Community Church, Kootenai, Idaho

“The recent Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* has created an unparalleled moment and a critical juncture in the battle for life. A growing army of pro-life apologists needs clear and honest resources to help them engage in wise, sensitive, and reasoned conversations with their friends, family, coworkers, and classmates. For decades, Scott Klusendorf’s tireless efforts, and the resources he has developed, have been the gold standard for educating and equipping people to better understand and communicate the reasonableness of the pro-life position. As a pastor, I’ve recommended *The Case for Life* to countless people because this book really has made the pro-life argument accessible, compelling, and shareable! In my humble opinion, there is no better book on the pro-life cause than *The Case for Life*.”

Michael Servello Jr., Pastor, Redeemer Church, Utica, New York

“*The Case for Life* is the handbook every Christian needs for getting equipped with a robust understanding of the pro-life position. It’s clear, accessible, nuanced, and thorough. It’s also desperately needed; Christians can’t afford to not know the case for life in this increasingly confused and hostile culture. I highly recommend it to every Christian who cares about the sanctity of life—which should be every Christian.”

Natasha Crain, speaker; podcaster; author, *Faithfully Different*

“Years from now, if God is gracious, the world will look back with horror on abortion, and folks will discuss the movement that helped make it unthinkable. Part of that discussion will be how people, especially young people, were recruited and equipped to defend the preborn. A name that will continually pop up in those discussions will be Scott Klusendorf, how he compelled people not only to care but also to speak up. He has made the case for life, in part and in whole, to thousands and thousands. It is the definitive source for what it means to be pro-life, and now in this edition is expanded and improved.”

John Stonestreet, President, Colson Center; Host, *BreakPoint*

“Scott Klusendorf has produced a marvelous resource that will equip pro-lifers to communicate more creatively and effectively as they engage our culture. *The Case for Life* is well-researched, well-written, logical, and clear, containing many pithy and memorable statements. Those already pro-life will be equipped; those on the fence will likely be persuaded. Readers looking to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves will find much here to say. I highly recommend this book.”

Randy Alcorn, author, *Heaven; If God Is Good; and Hand in Hand*

“*The Case for Life* is a veritable feast of helpful information about pro-life issues—the finest resource about these matters I have seen. It is accessible to the layperson, and it lays out a strategy for impacting the world for a culture of life.”

J. P. Moreland, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University; author, *The God Question*

“Scott Klusendorf’s accessible, winsomely written book presents a well-reasoned, comprehensive case for intrinsic human dignity and worth. Klusendorf not only equips the reader with incisive, insightful responses to pro-abortion arguments; he also presents a full defense of the biblical worldview.”

Paul Copan, Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics, Palm Beach Atlantic University; coauthor, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*

“This book will equip readers to articulate both a philosophical and a biblical case for life and to answer intelligently and persuasively the main objections to the pro-life position. It is easy to follow and hard to put down.”

Patrick Lee, McAleer Professor of Bioethics and Director, Institute of Bioethics, Franciscan University of Steubenville

The Case for Life

The Case for Life

Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture
(Second Edition)

Scott Klusendorf

Foreword by Lila Rose

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

The Case for Life: Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture (Second Edition)

© 2009, 2023 by Scott Klusendorf

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

Crossway® is a registered trademark in the United States of America.

Cover design: Jordan Singer

First printing 2023

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated into any other language.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible. Public domain.

Scripture quotations marked NASB 1995 are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.lockman.org.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked REB are taken from the Revised English Bible, copyright © Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press, 1989. All rights reserved.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-8067-3

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-8070-3

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-8068-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Klusendorf, Scott, 1960– author.

Title: The case for life : equipping Christians to engage the culture / Scott Klusendorf.

Description: Second edition. | Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, 2023. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022040569 (print) | LCCN 2022040570 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433580673 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9781433580680 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433580703 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Abortion—Religious aspects—Christianity. | Pro-life movement—United States.

Classification: LCC HQ767.25 .K58 2023 (print) | LCC HQ767.25 (ebook) | DDC 261.8/36—dc23/eng/20220824

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022040569>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022040570>

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP		32	31	30	29	28	27	26	25	24	23			
15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

To Stephanie, my beloved wife, who has never wavered in her support for my pro-life work and whose love gives me courage to confront ideas that diminish us all.

Contents

Foreword by Lila Rose *xiii*

Preface *xv*

Introduction *1*

PART 1: PRO-LIFE CHRISTIANS CLARIFY THE DEBATE

- 1 What Is the Pro-Life Argument? *11*
- 2 What's the Issue? *25*
- 3 What Does It Mean to Be Pro-Life? *39*
- 4 What Is the Unborn? *55*
- 5 What Makes Humans Valuable? *77*
- 6 What Are the Big Questions? *93*
- 7 What about Embryonic Stem Cell Research? *105*

PART 2: PRO-LIFE CHRISTIANS ADDRESS WORLDVIEW QUESTIONS

- 8 Which Worldviews Inform the Abortion Debate? *127*
- 9 Are Right and Wrong Real and Knowable? *149*
- 10 Is Moral Neutrality Possible? *161*
- 11 Does God Matter (Or Am I Just Matter?) *171*
- 12 Is the Bible Pro-Life? *193*

PART 3: PRO-LIFE CHRISTIANS
SURVEY THE MAJOR THINKERS

- 13 When Did I Come to Be? 209
- 14 When Did I Get a Right to Life? 225
- 15 Is Abortion Justified Even If the Unborn are Human? 241

PART 4: PRO-LIFE CHRISTIANS ANSWER
OBJECTIONS PERSUASIVELY

- 16 From Debate to Dialogue: Asking the Right Questions 265
- 17 The Coat Hanger Objection: “Women Will Die from Illegal Abortions” 273
- 18 The Tolerance Objection: “Don’t Force Your Views on Others” 279
- 19 The Hard Cases Objection: Rape, and the Mother’s Life at Stake 285
- 20 When the Attacks Get Personal 293

PART 5: PRO-LIFE CHRISTIANS TEACH AND EQUIP

- 21 Equip to Engage: The Pro-Life Pastor in Post-*Roe* America 303
- 22 Healed and Equipped: Hope for Post-Abortion Women and Men 317
- 23 Here We Stand: Cobelligence without Theological Compromise 325
- 24 Are Pro-Lifers Guilty of Moral Compromise? 331
- 25 Preparing for a Pro-Life Talk 339
- 26 Can We Win? 361

Appendix: Training Resources 371

General Index 377

Scripture Index 389

Foreword

THERE HAS NEVER BEEN a more exciting and important time to be a pro-life activist. With the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* on June 24, 2022, the power to truly protect all innocent human life is finally a real possibility. Before the overturning of *Roe*, we had an excuse. “Why was it legal to dismember a human child in her mother’s womb at any stage of pregnancy and for any reason?” we may have asked. “Well, the Supreme Court said we couldn’t stop it.” We could argue and debate all day long, but *Roe v. Wade* was a convenient and easy excuse for why Americans—especially Christian Americans—had let this killing go on for decades. But that excuse is gone. It is now the responsibility of every person who cares about respecting the dignity of life to make it a reality.

Setting the stage for the overturning of *Roe* involved years of effective advocacy and education in defense of human life. One of the most influential educators of our time is my friend Scott Klusendorf. Since *The Case for Life* first came out over ten years ago, it has been a vital resource for setting the intellectual foundations for why abortion is wrong. Scott explains with honesty, simplicity, and erudition that abortion is wrong because abortion is a violent act of killing committed against a living human being.

If you want to be winsome, thoughtful, and effective in winning over hearts and minds on the issue of abortion, then this new edition of *The Case for Life* is a must-read. While we may know the truth, we must also be educated on the opposition and equipped to communicate persuasively why every human life is precious and worth fighting for. *The Case for Life* is mandatory reading for every American hoping to understand the greatest civil rights issue of our time. From sidewalk counselors to social media activists, Scott will give you the information you need to stalwartly stand

for life. *The Case for Life* was instrumental in helping me write my how-to guide for pro-life activism, *Fighting for Life*.

Christians, in particular, can take special lessons from *The Case for Life*. Devoting your life to “leaving our nets” and following Jesus Christ means devoting ourselves to understanding his teaching and acting courageously based on that understanding. Scott grounds the principles in *The Case for Life* in the teachings of Christ, equipping believers to articulate the truth in a Christ-centered, gracious fashion.

This new edition of *The Case for Life* is a riveting resource to equip pro-lifers in this brave new era. In the chapters ahead, you will learn how to clarify the debate, address worldview questions, debunk lies and falsehoods, and equip others to defend life. When *Roe* fell, we won a battle, but the struggle to ensure every human child is protected from the violence of abortion has only just begun. Reading this book could equip you to save a life.

Lila Rose

Preface

THIS BOOK BEARS the marks of two men who mentored my early development as a pro-life apologist.

Gregg Cunningham, executive director of the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform, made the first investment, though I doubt he knew it the first time we met.

The setting was a Saturday breakfast for pastors in November 1990. At the time I was an associate pastor in Southern California, and organizers from the local crisis pregnancy center and right-to-life affiliate invited me and a hundred others to hear a pro-life message aimed at equipping church leaders to think strategically about abortion. Four of us showed up.

Undeterred by the dismal attendance, Gregg, with his background in law and politics (he served two terms in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, where he wrote the bill ending tax-financed abortions in that state), launched into the most articulate case for the lives of the unborn I'd ever heard. That was impressive enough.

But then he showed the pictures. Horrible pictures that made you cry. In the course of one seven-minute video depicting abortion, my career aspirations were forever altered, though it took me a few months to realize it. Gregg asked us to think of the two religious leaders in the parable of the good Samaritan who, although they most likely felt pity for the beating victim, did not act like they felt pity. Only the good Samaritan took pity, thus proving he truly did love his neighbor.

For the next several months, I followed Gregg to many of his Southern California speaking events. I memorized huge portions of his talks and devoured his writings. Six months later I left my job as an associate pastor (with the blessing of the church) and hounded Gregg even more until he put me on staff as his understudy, a position I was privileged to hold for

six years. Watching him dismantle abortion-choice arguments in front of hostile audiences, I lost my fear of opposition. Watching him sacrifice the comforts of this life so he could save unborn humans, I lost my desire for an easy job. Both losses have served me well. Gregg's signature quote haunts me to this day: "Most people who say they oppose abortion do just enough to salve the conscience but not enough to stop the killing." That's a staggering truth. Every time I am tempted to quit, I remember it.

While Gregg Cunningham taught me courage, Greg Koukl taught me to be a gracious ambassador for the Christian worldview. Koukl is not only a top-notch apologist; he's also one of the most winsome guys you'll ever meet. His mission is to equip Christians to graciously and incisively defend truth. That's refreshing, as too many Christians lack the diplomatic skills needed to effectively engage listeners.

I first heard Greg on the radio back in 1989. I thought, "Wow, this guy is really smart!" By 1993 his Sunday afternoon show was my personal clinic in clear thinking. In 1996 we met for the first time at a pro-life conference in Pasadena, where we were both presenters. In 1997 we met again, this time for lunch. Later that year I joined his staff at Stand to Reason. Shortly thereafter, Greg taught me a valuable lesson that continues to pay off each time I write or speak. The setting was the University of Illinois (Champaign), where I was scheduled to debate author and political science professor Eileen McDonagh. (I discuss McDonagh's views in chapter 15.) Campus abortion-choice advocates did not want the debate to transpire and tried numerous ploys to stop it. First, they claimed that debates only serve to legitimize the "anti-choice" position. If you won't debate slavery advocates, why on earth debate pro-lifers? When that didn't fly, they went after me personally with a series of editorials in the school newspaper. Every one of those stories falsely claimed I was associated with groups advocating violence against abortion doctors, while some even claimed that I hated gays. In response, I typed out a heated reply that shot down each of those lies and sent it off to Greg for a quick review before faxing it to the school paper.

That was a smart move. Greg graciously suggested that I tone things down a bit, or a lot. Instead of anger, I should communicate sadness that a fine university committed to the free exchange of ideas would even think of censoring a debate over a legitimate public policy question. His advice saved the day. I revised the letter, and instead of looking like angry victims,

the pro-lifers on campus now appeared reasonable and willing to debate, while the abortion-choicers looked like cowards out to suppress academic freedom. The school paper even hinted as much in a subsequent write-up after the debate was canceled. (I showed up anyway and, after making a defense for the pro-life view, took questions from critics, which made abortion-choicers look even more unreasonable.) The comic drawing alongside the story suggested that those censoring the event were “pansies.”

From that day forward I had a Koukl filter. Even if I’m hundreds of miles away, I hear Greg asking if the piece I’ve just written or the talk I’ve just given communicates in a winsome and attractive manner. When the answer is no, guess where I go?

Back to his radio show. Back to the CDs. Back to the commentaries on the Stand to Reason website. It’s there I recover my ambassador skills. I thank God for both of these men. They are responsible for saving countless lives and equipping many others for effective Christian service. I am but one they’ve impacted for eternity.

Throughout the writing process, Jay Watts, Stephanie Gray, Steve Wagner, Rich Poupard, Clinton Wilcox, and Nathan Apodaca made valuable contributions, refining the contents of the original manuscript. Patrick Lee at the Franciscan University of Steubenville also made helpful suggestions.

These are challenging days for pro-life advocates. *Roe v. Wade* is gone, but millions of our fellow citizens remain committed to the proposition that an entire class of human beings can be killed simply because they are in the way of something we want. Since Roe’s demise, states like California, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, and Vermont have swept away all limits on abortion and enshrined the practice into their state constitutions. These are challenging times for pro-lifers.

But surrender is not an option. We must equip ourselves to engage in a post-*Roe* world.

My prayer is that the words found in this book will give you courage to do just that.

Introduction

ROE V. WADE is history! After fifty years of court-mandated abortion-on-demand, pro-life advocates have finally won the day! The abortion debate is over, and we can move on to other issues.

Only it's not.

In fact, the real fight to save unborn lives is only beginning, and your voice is needed now more than ever. That is precisely why I rewrote this book, adding several new chapters and substantially updating others. I want you to become an effective pro-life apologist. Lives depend on it.

Why the Abortion Debate Is Not Over

With *Roe's* demise, the nine unelected judges on the Supreme Court no longer have sole legal authority to determine abortion policy.¹ Rather, the individual states will now decide how the practice is governed. Put simply, the American people—your friends, your classmates, your coworkers, and your family members—will now decide if unborn humans enjoy the same legal protections as you and me.

The good news—good news indeed!—is that pro-life advocates working through their elected representatives are now positioned to legally protect unborn humans in ways that *Roe* did not allow. The bad news is that the worldview assumptions that make abortion plausible to millions of our fellow citizens are deeply entrenched in the culture and aren't going away anytime soon. Reversing *Roe* is not going to fix that problem. Indeed, since

¹ Portions of this chapter first appeared in Scott Klusendorf, "Post-Roe America May Get Ugly: Next Steps in the Fight for Life," *Desiring God*, June 2, 2022, and "All We Did Was Survive: The State of the Pro-Life Movement under President Trump," *Desiring God*, January 20, 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org>.

Roe was struck in June 2022 (a good thing), pro-lifers have lost every single time the abortion issue has been put directly to the public for a vote. Even in a red state like Montana, voters rejected a modest ballot measure that did not ban abortion outright, but only protected children who survive abortion procedures and are born alive. A larger March for Life isn't going to fix the problem at the ballot box. More pregnancy centers won't fix it. To position ourselves for eventual political victory, the kind that results in legal protection for unborn humans, we must engage the public with a persuasive case for life that confronts abortion at the worldview level.

Making that case is what this book is about.

Consider this: right now as you're reading this sentence, people in the United States (and to some degree, the United Kingdom and Canada) are having a huge worldview argument over two key questions that will impact you, your children, and even your grandchildren for decades to come. How we answer these two questions will do nothing less than determine the future of human beings.

First, we're arguing about *truth*. Is moral truth real and knowable, or is it just a preference, like choosing chocolate ice cream over vanilla?

Second, we're arguing over *human value*. Are you and I valuable for who we are intrinsically, or only for what we can functionally do?

The question of truth and the question of human value are driving our national debates on abortion, cloning, and embryonic stem cell research (ESCR). The debates are contentious because they involve deep worldview commitments that get to the heart of who and what we are as people. But the debate itself is not complex. Either you believe that each and every human being has an equal right to life or you don't.

Pro-life Christians provide one answer. Although humans differ in their respective degrees of development, they are nonetheless equal because they share a common human nature that bears the image of their Creator. All humans have value simply because they're human.

Some leading abortion advocates provide a radically different perspective. They say that although you're identical to the embryo you once were—the same being now as you were then—it doesn't follow that you had the same right to life then as you have now. Being human is nothing special; your right to life is strictly accidental. You enjoy the right only because of some acquired characteristic you have that embryos do not have.

But here's the problem with that thinking. If humans have fundamental value only because of some characteristic they possess in varying degrees, then those with more of that characteristic have greater value than those with less. So-called human equality is only a myth!

My own thesis is that (1) a biblically informed pro-life view explains human equality, human rights, and moral obligations better than its secular rivals, and that (2) rank-and-file pro-life Christians can make an immediate impact provided they're equipped to engage the culture with a robust but graciously communicated case for life.

In this book, part 1 helps clarify the abortion debate and sets ground rules for engagement. In an increasingly subjective culture, things that were once givens—the rules of logic, the nature of arguments, and even what it means to be pro-life—are up for grabs. Failure to define terms and weed out distractions can short-circuit a pro-life case before it gets a hearing. Truth is, debates over abortion and embryonic stem cell research are not morally complex, though they're often presented that way. Can we kill the unborn? Yes, I think we can, *if* . . . If what? *If the unborn are not human beings.*

Part 2 is about foundations. What worldviews are idling beneath the abortion debate? Ever feel like you're talking right past a friend or colleague on abortion, as if you're coming from radically different worlds? You most likely are. Once you figure that out, get ready to be grilled incessantly on every one of your starting points. You'll be pressed to explain how a right to life can stand apart from fundamental religious underpinnings, why those underpinnings should be allowed to inform public policy, and why anyone should suppose that just because I exist as a human, I have a right to life that others are obliged to respect. The truth is, both sides bring prior metaphysical commitments to the debate and are asking the same exact question: What makes humans valuable in the first place? In short, the abortion issue—now more than ever—is becoming a worldview fight. You need to be aware of the big ideas idling beneath the surface.

Pro-life advocates also need a working knowledge of their most thoughtful critics—the people in the ivory towers. You don't need to master their arguments, but you do need to survey them. Part 3 looks at a few of the major players in the abortion debate. We won't take a deep dive into their thinking, but we will outline the contours of their arguments.

For Christians fearful they'll get caught with nothing to say on abortion, part 4 provides answers to the most common objections, including appeals to the hard cases, mere assertions dressed up as arguments, and personal attacks that ignore the real issue. Pro-lifers who stay focused on the one question that truly matters—the status of the unborn—won't be sidetracked.

Part 5 is about teaching and equipping. That means it is about *you*. First, how can lay pro-lifers communicate their ideas persuasively in public forums? How can we build pro-life churches? What is the role of the pro-life pastor? To make an impact on culture, pro-life pastors must not only understand the times but pursue certain vital tasks, which I outline in some detail. Second, are evangelicals compromising the gospel when they work with Catholics, Jews, and others to reform culture? Some evangelicals say yes. I say no, provided we draw careful lines between cobelligerence and co-confession. Third, how can post-abortion women and men find hope? Many precious pro-life advocates I meet are trying to atone for past abortions with tireless activity. There's a better way. It's called grace. Finally, I conclude with three goals designed to lay a foundation for victory.

I don't pretend to have written an exhaustive defense of the pro-life view. That's been done already by selected authors I cite throughout the text. My purpose is different. This book will take those sophisticated pro-life defenses and put them in a form that hopefully equips and inspires lay Christians (with or without academic sophistication) to engage the debate with friends, coworkers, and fellow believers.

More Than Ever, Your Voice Is Needed

Roe's demise is good news for the pro-life movement. But abortion is here to stay as long as so many of those who might be predisposed to accept our view and contend for it never actually experience pro-life teaching. Whatever our gains in Washington, we are falling far short in our churches and Christian schools. And the political cost of that failure is steep. Sustained political victory happens when large coalitions of pro-life voters command the electoral landscape to the extent that we can elect and protect pro-life candidates while thwarting those who want to protect and perpetuate abortion. Christian students are especially vital to building that coalition, but they're not hearing from us.

The problem is not messaging. It's access. For many Christian leaders and gatekeepers, the thought of pro-life teaching is dead on arrival.

Anyone who doubts me on that should visit Summit Ministries. Each summer, Summit runs regional worldview conferences in such places as Colorado, Arizona, and Georgia. The purpose is simple: prepare Christian students for the intellectual challenges they will face once they leave the safety of their local churches and step onto the university campus.

I teach the abortion sessions at Summit. For the last eight summers, I've conducted an informal survey of attendees. I ask for a show of hands on a specific question: "How many of you, prior to coming to Summit, have heard a pro-life apologetics presentation in your church aimed at equipping you to defend the pro-life view with unchurched friends?" The numbers have improved slightly as of late, but overall they are remarkably consistent. Out of 1,800 students present each summer, an average of 75 have prior exposure to a pro-life apologetics presentation in their local churches. Let that sink in: 75 out of 1,800! That's only 2.8 percent.

Churches aren't the only challenge. Life Training Institute (LTI), where I serve as president, trains Christians to make a persuasive case for life in the public square. The primary way we fulfill our mission is by making pro-life apologetics presentations in Catholic and Protestant high schools. Unlike other pro-life presentations that focus on chastity or sexual purity (programs we fully support), LTI presentations focus exclusively on why the pro-life view is true and reasonable to believe. It takes a Herculean effort and a lion's share of our budget to get in front of Catholic and Protestant high school students. Many private schools ignore us.

Credentials aren't the problem. Anyone who spends five minutes on Google can see that LTI speakers engage students with persuasive content and earn favorable reviews everywhere they go. Students routinely thank us for making persuasive arguments instead of emotional appeals. A common response is, "That was amazing. You're the first person to actually give us reasons."

Speaking fees aren't the problem either. We understand that most Christian schools are broke. Thus, we often send our speakers for free. It's still tough getting in.

Put simply, our problem is subject matter. We're offering an abortion presentation that many Christian schools and churches don't want. Our

challenge is to make them want it, to convince them it's vital to the formation of a Christian worldview, and to persuade them that students will thank them for hosting it.

If you think accessing Christian schools is tough, try popular Christian conferences geared to college-age and other young adults. Women ages eighteen to twenty-four are most at risk for abortion, yet you would never know it by surveying the typical speaking lineups at these conferences. You'll find sessions on global sex-trafficking, world hunger, economic justice, climate change, refugees, and racism, but there's no passion to engage the culture on the legally sanctioned killing of 61 million innocent human beings in our own nation since 1973. At times, pro-lifers encounter outright hostility. In 2015, Urbana—once the premier evangelical student conference—featured a Black Lives Matter speaker who used her keynote slot to criticize pro-lifers for “only doing activism that is comfortable” and for “withholding mercy from the living so that we might display a big spectacle of how much we want mercy to be shown to the unborn.”² Does any of this sound like an evangelical community awakened to love our unborn neighbors?

Meanwhile, we shouldn't assume that Christian students will get pro-life teaching from evangelical thought-leaders when some of the most influential ones consider pastoral silence a theological virtue. This tendency to silence goes far back. In 1994, Billy Graham said that addressing abortion in the pulpit could impede his “main message” of salvation. “I don't get into these things like abortion,” Graham told talk show host Larry King.³

While all this is profoundly disheartening, we can be thankful the pro-life movement lives to fight another day. Think back to 2016. In California, pro-life pregnancy centers were forced to advertise abortion services or pay crippling fines. In New York, Catholic nuns were told to fund abortion in their health care plans or dissolve. Nationally, pro-life doctors were pressured to refer patients for abortion or risk their medical credentials. Politically, the outlook was grim. Abortion activists were one appointment away from commanding the Supreme Court. And the candidate sworn to uphold abortion at any stage of pregnancy appeared to be running away with the election.

2 See Mark Oppenheimer, “Some Evangelicals Struggle with Black Lives Matter Movement,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 2016.

3 Joe Maxwell & Steve Hall, “Still-Silent Shepherds,” *World*, January 10, 2014.

By God’s gracious providence, the election that year went the other way and the new president, though serving only one term, reshaped the federal courts to the extent that *Roe* is history.⁴ Pro-life advocates now have a fighting chance. But make no mistake: an escape is not a triumph—not when millions of students predisposed to accept our message aren’t hearing the teaching.

There’s a remarkable scene in Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk*, a movie that depicts the rescue of 340,000 battle-weary and trapped British soldiers in May of 1940. As troops disembark from the hundreds of small boats sent to deliver them, a soldier remarks, “All we did is survive.” That was enough, given the circumstances. But Winston Churchill was quick to say, “We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory.” Four long years would pass before those same soldiers advanced on Normandy to begin the liberation of Western Europe.

The 2016 election of a pro-life president—and the subsequent rejection of *Roe* that his judicial appointments helped orchestrate—provided welcome relief to battle-weary pro-lifers. Some called *Roe*’s demise a miracle. Yes, it was. However, we should be quick to admit that it was more like Dunkirk than Normandy. We were spared further judicial defeat, but it did not signal a major advance of pro-life ideas—not when the worldview assumptions that make abortion plausible remain largely unchallenged, and millions of students predisposed to accept our message aren’t hearing it.

Now that *Roe* is history, the real work of changing hearts and minds begins. And in that work, it’s vital that we as pro-life Christians do these five things:

1. Clarify the debate.
2. Address worldview questions.
3. Survey the major thinkers.
4. Answer objections persuasively.
5. Teach and equip.

Consider this book your marching orders. In a post-*Roe* world, we’re all apologists now!

4 The president did indeed have lamentable character flaws that I am not endorsing here. Nor am I endorsing his past or future candidacy. I am simply stating the fact that his executive orders and judicial appointments saved the pro-life movement from disaster.

PART 1

PRO-LIFE CHRISTIANS
CLARIFY THE DEBATE

What Is the Pro-Life Argument?

SEEKING ADVENTURE, you post the following to your social media page and hang on for the ride: “Some choices are wrong. We can do better than abortion.”

Right away a “friend” is typing. Six minutes later, you have a string of comments, not all of them nice. “Why do you hate women? Do you want them to die in back alleys?” “What are you doing for kids after they’re born?” “Do you have a uterus? If not, shut up!” “If you were truly pro-life, you’d care about all life, not just fetuses!” “Who are you to dictate what’s right or wrong? Don’t impose your views on me!” You expected controversy, but marvel at how much outrage your brief post provoked. It feels like something else is going on here.

Indeed it is.

What’s driving the abortion controversy is not who loves women and who hates them. Rather, it’s a serious philosophical debate about who counts as one of us. Either you believe that each and every human being has an equal right to life, or you don’t. That’s why abortion debates can heat up in a heartbeat.¹

The Essential Pro-Life Argument:

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

How can pro-life advocates keep cool under fire in a deeply polarized culture? The key to successful engagement is clarity: when critics muddy the waters with

¹ Portions of this chapter first appeared in Scott Klusendorf, “You Can Hate Abortion and Love Women: What’s under the Debate over Life,” *Desiring God*, June 6, 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org>.

phony appeals to tolerance, gender, or caring about other issues, it's crucial that you stay anchored to the three most important words in pro-life apologetics:

1. Syllogism
2. Syllogism
3. Syllogism

A *syllogism* is a form of deductive reasoning consisting of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. It's a way to formally state your argument. The pro-life argument can (and should) be stated as a syllogism. If you do not stay tethered to your syllogism, critics will change the subject.

The pro-life argument—its syllogism—can be stated as follows:

Premise 1: It is wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being.

Premise 2: Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being.

Therefore,

Conclusion: Abortion is morally wrong.

As we shall see, pro-life advocates support their formal argument with science and philosophy. They argue from the science of embryology that the unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings. You didn't "come from" an embryo; you once *were* an embryo.

In the 2020 edition of their medical textbook *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, authors Keith L. Moore, T. V. N. Persaud, and Mark G. Torchia write this:

Human development begins at fertilization when a sperm fuses with an oocyte to form a single cell, the zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell (capable of giving rise to any cell type) marks the beginning of each of us as a unique individual.²

Pro-life advocates argue from philosophy that between you the embryo and you the adult, there's no essential difference that could justify intentionally killing you at that earlier stage of development. Differences of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependence are not good reasons for

² Keith L. Moore, T. V. N. Persaud, and Mark G. Torchia, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*, 11th ed. (Philadelphia: Elsevier, 2020), 11.

saying you had no right to life then but you do now. Stephen Schwarz suggests the acronym SLED as a helpful reminder of these nonessential differences:³

Size: You were smaller as an embryo, but since when does your body size determine value? Large humans are not more valuable than small humans.

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

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

Degree of dependence: 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.)

In short, humans are equal by nature, not function. Although they differ immensely in their respective degrees of development, they're nonetheless equal because they share a common human nature—which they've possessed from the moment they began to exist.

Again, we'll explore that scientific and philosophic defense in detail later, but for now, notice the key point: pro-life advocates present an *argument* for their position.

Arguments can be evaluated three ways. First, for *clarity*: Are the terms clear? Second, for *soundness*: Are the premises true? And third, for *validity*: Does the conclusion follow logically from the premises? If the argument passes these tests, it stands.

Defining Our Terms

For the purpose of clarity, let's define what we mean by some key terms used in the abortion debate.

1. *What do we mean by "wrong"?* We'll take a closer look at this question later, but to say that abortion is wrong is to make an objective moral

3 Stephen Schwarz, *The Moral Question of Abortion* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1990), 15–17.

claim rather than a subjective one. Subjective claims are about what I like or prefer—for example, ice cream flavors. Objective claims are about what is morally true regardless of likes or preferences. When pro-life advocates state that abortion is wrong, they aren't saying they merely dislike abortion. They're saying abortion is wrong regardless of anyone's personal tastes or preferences. Their claim is objective, not subjective.

2. *What do we mean by "abortion"?* The pro-life argument (syllogism) defines abortion as the intentional killing of an innocent human being. That abortion entails intentional killing is acknowledged and even affirmed by many who defend the practice.

Abortionist Warren Hern, author of *Abortion Practice*—the standard medical text that teaches abortion procedures—made the following statement to a Planned Parenthood conference:

We have reached a point in this particular technology [dilation and evacuation (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.⁴

In a *Salon* piece, feminist Camille Paglia, writes this:

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, which results in the annihilation of concrete individuals and not just clumps of insensate tissue.⁵

Philosopher and jurist Ronald Dworkin describes abortion as “a choice for death,” one that “deliberately kills” a developing embryo.⁶

4 Paper presented at the Meeting of the Association of Planned Parenthood Physicians, San Diego, California, October 26, 1978. See Warren Hern and Billie Corrigan, “What About Us? Staff Reactions to D&E,” Boulder Abortion Clinic, <https://www.drhern.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/staff-reaction-de.pdf>.

5 Camille Paglia, “Fresh Blood for the Vampire,” *Salon*, September 10, 2008, <https://www.salon.com/>.

6 Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion: An Argument about Abortion, Euthanasia, and Individual Freedom* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 3.

In a dissenting opinion in the 2000 Supreme Court case *Stenberg v. Carhart*, former Justice Anthony Kennedy states this:

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.⁷

Feminist Naomi Wolf says that abortion involves a “real death,” and that to claim otherwise cheapens our view of human life:

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.⁸

As early as 1970, an editorial in the medical journal *California Medicine* conceded that abortion kills a living human being and that claiming otherwise was intellectually dishonest:

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.⁹

7 *Stenberg v. Carhart*, 530 U.S. 914 (2000).

8 Naomi Wolf, “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” *The New Republic*, October 16, 1995.

9 “A New Ethic for Medicine and Society,” *California Medicine* (September 1970): 68.

In his book *A Defense of Abortion*, David Boonin—a philosophy professor at the University of Colorado—writes that “a human fetus, after all, is simply a human being at a very early stage in his or her development.”¹⁰ Yet he argues for abortion anyway, even while conceding that you’re identical to the embryo/fetus you once were. You are the same human being today as you were then.

In *Writings on an Ethical Life*, Australian ethicist and philosopher Peter Singer states:

Whether a being is a member of a given species is something that can be determined scientifically, by an examination of the nature of the chromosomes in the cells of living organisms. In this sense, there is no doubt that from the first moments of its existence an embryo conceived from human sperm and eggs is a human being.¹¹

3. *What do we mean by “innocent”?* Human fetuses are innocent in that they do nothing to warrant intentional killing. Their age and development confirm this innocence: dependent human beings at this stage of life cannot intentionally harm anyone. They can only present their need to be sustained.

Abortion is therefore defined as *the intentional killing of an innocent human being*—a definition that’s accepted even by some who nevertheless support abortion.

Finally, visual evidence confirms that abortion intentionally kills innocent human beings. Visual depictions of abortion are controversial, but they reawaken moral intuitions and convey truths in ways that words alone cannot. As Gregg Cunningham points out, “When you show pictures of abortion, abortion protests itself.”¹²

Consider movies like *Schindler’s List*, *Hacksaw Ridge*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *The Passion of the Christ*. Chances are you paid money to watch these films, despite lengthy sequences of gruesome imagery. Perhaps teachers at your local high school took students to see them for educational purposes. Even if they didn’t, I suspect they used grisly imagery from World War II or the Vietnam War in classroom presentations to convey the reality of those

10 David Boonin, *A Defense of Abortion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 20.

11 Peter Singer, *Writings on an Ethical Life* (New York: Ecco Press, 2000), 127.

12 Cunningham says this often in public presentations.

events. Intellectual honesty requires that we teach the abortion controversy with no less academic rigor.

Almost a decade before the American Civil War, Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass gave an immortal speech that became famously known as “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” He confronted critics who said reasoned arguments were enough to end slavery. According to Douglass, the slavery debate had been won on the level of reasoned argument, but the public had yawned. He argued that in order to awaken the moral conscience of the nation, “it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.” Douglass was absolutely right. The practice of slavery was being sustained not by reasoned arguments but by slaveholders’ desire for self-preservation, as well as by apathy or inactivity among those who were not slaveholders. The battle to be fought wasn’t only a battle of ideas; it was also a battle of conscience.¹³ Antislavery advocates later circulated gruesome photographs depicting the inhumanity of chattel slavery. These pictures helped galvanize antislavery sentiment in the North. The same, I submit, is true of the abortion debate today. Millions of Americans will tolerate abortion as long as they never see abortion.

I realize that some may object to abortion victim images on grounds that they substitute emotion for reason and therefore should not be used in public presentations. But this objection misses the point entirely. The question is not, Are the pictures emotional? They are. The real question is, Are the pictures true? If so, they ought to be admitted as evidence. We ought to avoid *empty* appeals to emotion—those offered *in place of* good reasons. If, however, the pictures substantiate the reasons being offered, and do not obscure them, they serve a vital purpose. Truth is the issue.

This is precisely the point feminist Naomi Wolf made on abortion imagery in her article “Our Bodies, Our Souls.” Speaking to her fellow abortion-choice advocates, she candidly writes:

The pro-choice movement often treats with contempt the pro-lifers’ practice of holding up to our faces their disturbing graphics. . . . [But] how can we charge that it is vile and repulsive for pro-lifers to brandish

13 Content from Frederick Douglass as cited in Adam Seagrave, “Abortion and Our ‘Moral Sense,’” *Public Discourse* (March 12, 2013), <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com>.

vile and repulsive images if the images are real? To insist that truth is in poor taste is the very height of hypocrisy. Besides, if these images are often the facts of the matter, and if we then claim that it is offensive for pro-choice women to be confronted with them, then we are making the judgment that women are too inherently weak to face a truth about which they have to make a grave decision. This view is unworthy of feminism.¹⁴

To review, here's the basic pro-life argument (stated again as a syllogism with two premises and a conclusion):

1. It is wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being.
2. Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being.
3. Therefore, abortion is morally wrong.

This argument stands or falls on its merits. To defeat it, you must do one of three things: (1) show that the terms are unclear; (2) show that the conclusion doesn't follow from the premises; or (3) show that one or more of the premises is untrue. Outside that, the argument stands.

What This Debate Is Not About

In the broader conversation of the abortion debate, certain statements or lines of thought are brought up which detract from what this debate is really about. We can therefore attain further clarity by stripping these nonessentials away.

The abortion debate is not about labels. Dismissing the pro-life argument as “religious” is common, but mistaken. Ignore for the moment that there are secular pro-lifers and religious pro-choicers. Calling an argument “religious” is only a dodge, not a refutation. As Francis J. Beckwith points out, arguments are either sound or unsound, valid or invalid. Calling an argument “religious” is a category mistake—like asking, How tall is the number three?¹⁵ Pro-lifers argue that because it's wrong to intentionally kill innocent human beings and because abortion does that, abortion therefore

¹⁴ Wolf, “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” 26.

¹⁵ Carl E. Olson, “The Case against Abortion: An Interview with Dr. Francis Beckwith, Author of *Defending Life*,” *Ignatius*, January 21, 2008, www.ignatiusinsight.com.

is wrong. If critics can refute that argument, fair enough. But dismissing it with a label is intellectually lazy.

The abortion debate is not about the origins of an argument. Dismissing an argument based on where and how it might have originated is also a dodge, and not a refutation. Suppose chauvinistic men popularize the pro-life argument because they secretly despise women. How does this lamentable character flaw refute the pro-life syllogism above? The answer, of course, is that it doesn't. That syllogism stands or falls apart from one's behavior. Likewise, the fact that Margaret Sanger was a racist who promoted eugenics does nothing to prove that abortion is wrong or that the pro-life syllogism is right. An abortion-choice advocate might aptly reply, "Well, maybe she was and maybe she wasn't a racist. But how does that help your argument or refute mine?"

To cite another example, a Muslim philosopher by the name of Al-Ghazali once formulated the following argument for theism:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

Assuming the argument is a good one, should Christian theists reject it based on its non-Christian origins? Of course not. The argument stands or falls on its merits, not on the person or belief system generating it.

The abortion debate is not about motives. Arguments stand or fall quite apart from the motives of those making them. Suppose an elite trial lawyer defends a client solely for the money. Does his motive for taking the case invalidate his argument on behalf of the client? Likewise, even if it were true that pro-lifers defend the unborn only for political expediency, or only because they hate women (both of which are not remotely true), it wouldn't follow that their pro-life argument is invalid or unsound.

The abortion debate is not about perspectives. As Christopher Kaczor points out, there is no such thing as a "woman's perspective" on abortion any more than there is a male perspective or a brown-eyed person's perspective.¹⁶

¹⁶ Christopher Kaczor, *The Ethics of Abortion: Women's Rights, Human Life, and the Question of Justice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 8–9.

Indeed, feminists—like women in general—do not share identical perspectives on the abortion issue, and that’s true even for feminists who support abortion. For example, feminist Naomi Wolf calls abortion “a real death,”¹⁷ while feminist Katha Pollitt thinks it’s no different from vacuum-cleaning your house.¹⁸ In short, while gender perspectives on abortion help us understand personal experience, they are no substitute for rational inquiry. Arguments must be advanced and defended, and they stand or fall strictly on their merits.

The abortion debate is not about psychology. True, many women regret their abortions. However, many others do not. What follows? Nothing follows in terms of the rightness or wrongness of abortion. The swiftest rejoinder to a sign reading “I regret my abortion” is one reading “I don’t regret mine.” Both signs speak to the psychological state of the subject, not the morality of the act itself. Abortion is not wrong because a woman regrets having one. It’s wrong because it intentionally kills an innocent human being. Thus, while post-abortion experiences help us understand the personal feelings of those involved (and this is important for healing), they do not speak to the moral question of abortion. My feelings about something don’t determine whether it’s right or wrong.

The abortion debate is not about lost benefits. Pro-life advocates sometimes forget their own argument. Abortion is not wrong because it kills future doctors who might cure cancer or future musicians who will rival Beethoven. It’s wrong because it intentionally kills an innocent human being, regardless of his or her eventual gifting or brilliance. Put simply, it’s just as wrong to intentionally kill a homeless man with only a grade-school education as it would be to intentionally kill some highly prominent contributor to our society’s advancement.

The abortion debate is not about moral neutrality. If you believe that all moral views are equally valid, you are *not* neutral—and you haven’t refuted the pro-life argument. You’re espousing moral relativism, a view that says right and wrong are either up to each individual or up to society, and are never objective truths that we discover. Morality, like choosing your favorite flavor of ice cream, is strictly a matter of personal preference. We’ll take

17 Wolf, “Our Bodies, Our Souls.”

18 Katha Pollit, *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights* (New York: Picador, 2014).

up relativism in a later chapter, but take note: relativism is *not* neutral. Relativists think that they're right and nonrelativists are wrong—or else they wouldn't oppose nonrelativists who argue that moral truth is real and knowable.

The abortion debate is not about legal neutrality. The state either recognizes the humanity of the unborn, and thus protects them, or else it doesn't recognize their humanity and thus permits killing them. Suppose it's 1860 and the Supreme Court takes no position on the humanity of slaves, but affirms the legal right to own them. Would this be neutral?

Bad Ways to Argue

A few more guidelines for effective argument need to be mentioned.

First, *argue rather than attack*. If you attack the person rather than engage with his or her argument, you commit the *ad hominem* fallacy. The Latin phrase *ad hominem* is just another term for name-calling. Attacking the person is fallacious, because even if the personal attack is true, it does nothing to refute the argument presented.

Consider the charge that pro-life advocates have no right to oppose abortion since they refuse to adopt unwanted children. That claim is not true, but suppose it were. How does a pro-life advocate's alleged unwillingness to adopt a child justify an abortionist killing that child and others? How does it refute the pro-life syllogism? In short, it doesn't. At best, the *ad hominem* attack only demonstrates that the pro-life advocate fails to live out his view, not that his argument is invalid or unsound.

Or take the charge that some pro-life advocates are inconsistent because they oppose abortion but not the death penalty. How does their alleged inconsistency refute their pro-life syllogism? Could the unborn still be human—and abortion wrong—even if pro-lifers *are* inconsistent? Of course. However, the pro-life view is not that it is *always* wrong to kill, but only that it's wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being. In our society's legal systems, the death penalty by definition does *not* entail killing an innocent human being, but a guilty one. Thus, there's no inconsistency.

A second guideline is to understand the difference between a mere assertion and a well-supported argument. Suppose a pro-life advocate lays out the pro-life syllogism above and supports it with science and philosophy. Instead of refuting the pro-life syllogism, the critic responds, "Well, women

have a right to choose.” Is that an argument or assertion? It’s only an assertion, and the obvious question to ask in response is, “A right to choose *what?* And where does that right come from?”

Sometimes the assertion comes in the form of a hidden premise. For example, a critic may discount a pro-life argument with an assertion: “The embryo is not self-aware and has no immediately exercisable desires.” The hidden and undefended premise is that self-awareness and desires give us a right to life. But the critic presents no argument for that hidden premise. Why does self-awareness or having desires matter? Why are they value-giving in the first place? These claims must be argued for, not merely asserted.

Again, remember the importance of the basic syllogism for the pro-life apologist:

1. It is wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being.
2. Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being.
3. Therefore, abortion is morally wrong.

So when critics attack you for hating women or for promoting male-centered perspectives or for arguing religion, ask yourself: *How does this objection refute my pro-life syllogism?* Framed that way, many objections against the pro-life view are shown to miss the point entirely.

The crux of the abortion debate is not about a surgical procedure. If having an abortion were morally equivalent to removing your appendix, there would be no debate. It’s about one question that trumps all others: *Are the unborn members of the human family?* Everything else is a distraction.

Finally, here’s a real-world application of what this chapter has been about. When accused of hating women, the pro-life advocate might clarify the issue in this way:

“I hope you don’t believe that pro-lifers hate women, but I think you are right about one thing: if the unborn are not members of the human family, I am indeed unfairly imposing my views on women. However, if each and every human being has an equal right to life—and if the unborn is one of us, sharing humanity with you and me—can you see things my way? If you shared my position that abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being, wouldn’t you do everything you could to stop it? Wouldn’t you want unborn humans protected by law just like everyone else? Of course, I realize

you don't share my position, so my point here is really quite modest: the issue that separates us is not that I hate women and you love them. What separates us is that I believe the unborn are members of the human family and you don't. That's the issue I hope we can talk about."

Helpful Resources

Scott Klusendorf and John Stonestreet, "21 Days of Prayer for Life," Colson Center, <https://www.flnwo.org/uploads/5/8/4/3/5843814/21-days-of-prayer-for-life-template.pdf>.

Scott Klusendorf, "The Question Abortion Advocates Won't Answer," Desiring God, July 22, 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/>.