

THE 5-MINUTE PRO-LIFER



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Issue #1

How to Defend Your Pro-Life Views in 5 Minutes or Less

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Suppose that you have just five minutes to graciously defend your pro-life beliefs with friends or classmates. Can you do it with rational arguments? What should you say? And how can you simplify the abortion issue for those who think it's hopelessly complex?

Here's how to succeed in three easy steps:

1) Clarify the issue. 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. It treats the distinct human being, with his or her own inherent moral worth, as nothing more than a disposable instrument. Conversely, if the unborn are not human, killing them for any reason requires no more justification than having a tooth pulled.

In other words, arguments based on "choice" or "privacy" miss the point entirely. Would anyone that you know support a mother killing her toddler in the name of "choice and who decides?" Clearly, if the unborn are human, like toddlers, we shouldn't kill them in the name of choice anymore than we would a toddler. Again, this debate is about just one question: What is the unborn? At this point, some may object that your comparisons are not fair—that killing a fetus is morally different than killing a toddler. Ah, but that's the issue, isn't it? Are the unborn, like toddlers, members of the human family? That is the one issue that matters. (See the "Toddler Tactics" article for more on this.)

Remind your critics that you are vigorously "pro-choice" when it comes to women choosing a number of moral goods. You support a woman's right to choose her own doctor, to choose her own husband, to choose her own job, and to choose her own religion, to name a few. These are among the many choices that you fully support for women. But some choices are wrong, like killing innocent human beings simply because they are in the way and cannot defend themselves.¹ No, we shouldn't be allowed to choose that.

2) Defend your pro-life position with science and philosophy. Scientifically, we know that from the earliest stages of development, the unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings. Leading embryology books confirm this.² For example, 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."³ Prior to his abortion advocacy, former Planned Parenthood President Dr. Alan Guttmacher was perplexed that anyone, much less a medical doctor, would question this. "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*.⁴

Philosophically, we can say that embryos are less developed than newborns (or, for that matter, toddlers) but this difference is not morally significant in the way abortion advocates need it to be. Consider the claim that the immediate capacity for self-awareness bestows value on human beings. Notice that this is not an argument, but an arbitrary assertion. Why is some development needed? And why is this particular degree of development (i.e., higher brain function) decisive rather than another? These are questions that abortion advocates do not adequately address.

As Stephen Schwarz points out, there is no morally significant difference between the embryo that you once were and the adult that you are today. Differences of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency are not relevant such that we can say that you had no rights as an embryo but you do have rights today. Think of the acronym **SLED** as a helpful reminder of these non-essential differences:⁵

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 human than small ones? Men are generally larger than women, but that doesn't mean that they deserve more rights. Size doesn't equal value.

Level of development: True, embryos and fetuses are less developed than the adults they'll one day become. 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 self-awareness makes one human. But if that is true, newborns do not qualify as valuable human beings. Six-week old infants lack the immediate capacity for performing human mental functions, as do the reversibly comatose, the sleeping, and those with Alzheimer's Disease.

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 human, merely changing their location can't make them valuable.

Degree of Dependency: If viability makes us human, 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, 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.

3) Challenge your listeners to be intellectually honest. Ask the tough questions. When critics say that birth makes the unborn human, ask, "How does a mere change of location from inside the womb to outside the womb change the essential nature of the unborn?" If they say that brain development or self-awareness makes us human, ask if they would agree with Joseph Fletcher that those with an IQ below 20 or perhaps 40 should be declared non-persons? If not, why not? True, some people will ignore the scientific and philosophic case you present for the pro-life view and argue for abortion based on self-interest. That is the lazy way out. Remind your critics that if we care about truth, we will courageously follow the facts wherever they lead, no matter what the cost to our own self-interests.

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Notes:

1. Gregory Koukl, *Precious Unborn Human Persons* (Lomita: STR Press, 1999) p. 11.
2. See also, T.W. Sadler, *Langman's Embryology*, 5th ed. (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1993) p. 3; Ronand O'Rahilly & Pabiola Muller, *Human Embryology and Teratology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley-Liss, 1996) pp. 8, 29.
3. Keith L. Moore and T.V.N. Persaud, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1998) p.2.
4. A. Guttmacher, *Life in the Making: The Story of Human Procreation* (New York: Viking Press, 1933) p. 3.
5. Stephen Schwarz, *The Moral Question of Abortion* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990) p. 18.