

“Scott Klusendorf is one of the nation’s top pro-life thinkers, and *The Case for Life* is a veritable feast of helpful information about pro-life issues. The book is 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. I highly recommend it.”

—J. P. MORELAND, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy,
Biola University; author of *Kingdom Triangle*

“This book delivers: it will indeed equip the reader to articulate both a philosophical case 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, but it will also repay study. It is filled with helpful analogies, examples, and stories. The reader will want to buy additional copies as gifts for friend and relatives, any who are high school age or above.”

—PATRICK LEE, McAleer Professor of Bioethics, Director,
Institute of Bioethics, Franciscan University of Steubenville

“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, whether simplistic or sophisticated, he also presents a full defense of the biblical worldview—the very context needed to ground the existence of objective values and human rights. Truly, ‘a person’s a person, no matter how small.’”

—PAUL COPAN, Professor and Pledger Family Chair of
Philosophy and Ethics, Palm Beach Atlantic University,
West Palm Beach, Florida

“*The Case for Life* has set a new standard for pro-life apologetics. Accessible enough for the layperson, Scott has articulated and refuted every major and minor pro-choice objection to the pro-life position. Honed from the crucible of thousands of student interactions over the last decade, Scott has heard it all and met the challenge. This book is evidence that the case for life still stands.”

—BARBARA SHACKELFORD, Executive Director,
A Women’s Pregnancy Center, Tallahassee, Florida

“Scott Klusendorf takes the insights and methods for defending the right to life he so effectively communicates in his teaching presentations into a book that provides a clear and cogent biblical rationale for the sanctity and dignity of life, born or unborn. This is a great tool for the layman who knows he or she is pro-life, but doesn’t understand the presuppositions on which his or her beliefs are based or who doesn’t feel equipped to defend or discuss the issue with others.”

—CHUCK COLSON, Founder, Prison Fellowship

“*The Case for Life* is *prophetic* and *practical*. It is *prophetic* in the sense that it makes a clear and undeniable argument based on truth about human value. It gives a biblically informed pro-life view. It is *practical* because it provides pro-life advocates a toolbox for offering understandable defenses for the unborn. It shows how to logically answer objections and move a debate to a dialogue. As a pastor, I was challenged, informed, and inspired to confidently and graciously make a difference in my generation for the cause of life.”

—JIMMY DALE PATTERSON, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church,
Newman, Georgia

“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, best-selling author

the
CASE
for
LIFE

Equipping Christians to Engage the Culture

SCOTT KLUSENDORF

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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*

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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 same 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.

I am also indebted to others who played a direct role in this book. Steve Weimar, my associate and friend at Life Training Institute, not only works tirelessly organizing (and promoting) my speaking events, he’s also my number one sounding board. Many pages in this book were strengthened with his critical eye.

Throughout the writing process, Jay Watts, Stephanie Gray, Steve Wagner, and Rich Poupard 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. The executive and legislative branches of the federal government are now firmly in the hands of those deeply 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. Even as I write, liberal lawmakers are crafting legislation designed to sweep away every limitation on abortion and destructive embryo research. If that weren’t bad enough, a small but vocal group of “pro-life” leaders now says we might as well give up the fight to legally protect unborn humans.

Yes, they are right about one thing. Things are bad.

But surrender is not an option. We must equip ourselves to engage.

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

INTRODUCTION

RIGHT NOW AS YOU ARE reading this sentence, the United States (and to some degree, Great Britain and Canada) is having a huge argument over two key questions that will impact you, your children, and even your grandchildren for decades to come. How we answer these 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 what we *are* intrinsically or only valuable for what we can *do* functionally?

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. Humans have value simply because they are human.

Secular critics like David Boonin provide a radically different perspective: Although you are identical to the embryo you once were—meaning you are the same being now as you were then—it does not follow that you had the same right to life then as you do now. Being human is nothing special, meaning your right to life is strictly accidental. You have it because of some acquired characteristic you have that embryos do not. To make sure we get the point, Boonin includes this chilling passage:

On my desk in my office where most of this book [*A Defense of Abortion*] was written and revised, there are several pictures of my son, Eli. In one, he is gleefully dancing on the sand along the Gulf of Mexico, the cool ocean

breeze wreaking havoc with his wispy hair. In a second, he is tentatively seated in the grass in his grandparents' backyard, still working to master the feat of sitting up on his own. In a third, he is only a few weeks old, clinging firmly to the arms that are holding him and still wearing the tiny hat for preserving body heat that he wore home from the hospital. Through all of the remarkable changes that these pictures preserve, he remains unmistakably the same little boy. In the top drawer of my desk, I keep another picture of Eli. This picture was taken . . . 24 weeks before he was born. The sonogram image is murky, but it reveals clearly enough a small head tilted back slightly, and an arm raised up and bent, with the hand pointing back toward the face and the thumb extended out toward the mouth. There is no doubt in my mind that this picture, too, shows the same little boy at a very early stage in his physical development. And there is no question that the position I defend in this book entails that it would have been morally permissible to end his life at this point.¹

So what makes us equal? Here's Boonin's problem: If humans only have fundamental value because of some characteristic they possess in varying degrees, those with more of it have greater value than those with less.

My own thesis is that a biblically informed pro-life view explains human equality, human rights, and moral obligations better than its secular rivals and that 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.

Making that case is what this book is about.

Part 1 helps pro-life Christians simplify debates over abortion and embryonic stem cell research. These issues are not morally complex, though they are 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 explains why moral neutrality is impossible. In a typical abortion debate, the pro-life advocate will be grilled incessantly on every one of his starting points. His critics will demand to know 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?

¹David Boonin, *A Defense of Abortion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xiii–xiv.

For Christians fearful they'll get caught with nothing to say on abortion, Part 3 provides answers to the most common objections including appeals to the hard cases, assertions of bodily autonomy, 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.

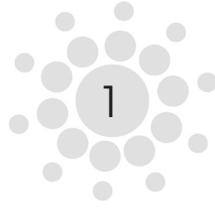
Part 4 addresses questions related to the pastoral side of pro-life advocacy. First, what is the role of the pro-life pastor? To make an impact on culture, pro-life pastors must not only understand the times but pursue four vital tasks that I outline in some detail. Second, are evangelicals who work with Catholics, Jews, and others to reform culture compromising the gospel? Some evangelicals say yes. I say no, provided we draw careful lines between co-belligerence 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 do not 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.

Admittedly, a book about pro-life apologetics may not appeal to some lay Christians. It seems many believers would rather focus on end times rather than these times. That's a mistake. Humans who ignore questions about truth and human value may soon learn what it really means to be left behind.

PART ONE

Pro-Life
Christians Clarify
the Debate



WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

The abortion controversy is not a debate between those who are pro-choice and those who are anti-choice. It's not about privacy. It's not about trusting women to decide. It's not about forcing one's morality. It's about one question that trumps all others.

EMILY NEVER SAW IT COMING. A fifteen-year friendship was on the brink of disaster over one word. *Abortion.*

She met Pam at a Christian college, and the relationship paid off immediately. Emily excelled at language and history, while Pam was a math and science whiz. Together they could tackle any required course, and they did. Both graduated with honors a semester ahead of their classmates. Within a year they both married their college sweethearts. Later, when kids came along and budgets got tight, they swapped baby clothes and enjoyed occasional sack lunches together. Even when a job change forced Pam to move fifty miles away, they still managed to meet for coffee at least once a month. Emily looked forward to her times with Pam. She needed escape from the kids, not to mention the endless grind of household chores. Pam was easy to talk to, optimistic, and always lifted Emily's spirits. Sometimes they shared prayer requests.

Now Emily wondered if they would ever feel connected again. For the hundredth time that night, she replayed the conversation that started it all.

Pam: Emily, did I tell you that my niece, Sarah, is pregnant?

Emily: What? You mean the one in California? We've never met, but you talk about her a lot.

Pam: Yes, that's the one. You'd love her. She's nineteen and a freshman at college. Sweet, sweet girl. Smart as a whip and drop-dead gorgeous. I would have never thought . . .

Emily: Did her parents have any clue she was in trouble?

Pam: None. Sarah attends church religiously and never had a serious boyfriend before Jack. They met over the summer and attend the same university. He swept her right off her feet.

Emily: What about his parents?

Pam: Seldom home and very liberal. Sarah told Jack she wanted to wait, but with no adults around, well, you can guess the rest.

Emily: I don't have to. Have they talked to their pastor?

Pam: Well, Sarah has one, but Jack's not the churchgoing type. He's very liberal, like his parents. Says Christianity is a bunch of fairy tales, a crutch for the weak.

Emily: You mean she's romantically involved with a non-Christian?

Pam: Yep. I tried to warn her, but she insisted she could change him. Even now, she thinks he'll change if given enough time.

Emily: Oh dear. Since when has that ever worked? We used to call that missionary dating.

Pam: Yeah, only in this case, the "missionary" is pregnant. And her mission "project" wants out. He'll pay for the abortion, but that's it.

Emily: But what if she doesn't want one? What if she keeps the child?

Pam: I guess he won't stick around to find out.

Emily: What a loser! He's going to bolt no matter what she does. What's she thinking?

Pam: Right now, only about keeping him, whatever it takes.

Emily: How about her parents?

Pam: Funny you ask. They're supportive but think Jack has a point.

Emily: What? You mean they think abortion might be an option?

Pam: Jack told Sarah that if she has this baby, she'll never finish college and won't make enough money to support herself. She'll also forfeit a promising modeling career and cause her parents untold embarrassment in the community. Her dad's a deacon, you know. Maybe Jack's on to something.

Emily: What did you say?

Pam: Only that Sarah stands to lose a lot and needs to think about what Jack said.

Emily: What do you mean by that? You aren't saying you buy what Jack's telling her, are you?

Pam: Personally, no. I oppose abortion and would never have one. But if Sarah thinks it's the right decision for her at this time, it's not my place to judge. I've never walked in her shoes.

Emily: Pam, I'm shocked. How could killing an innocent human being ever be the right call?

Pam: I personally don't think it is. Like I said, I don't like abortion one bit. I hope she keeps the baby. But it's not my decision. If you and I don't like abortion, we shouldn't have one. But Sarah may feel differently, and we shouldn't force our views on her.

Emily: I still don't understand. How can a Christian ever say abortion is okay just because it would solve a difficult life problem?

Pam: No, no, you've got me all wrong. I hate abortion. Like I said, I personally think she should keep the baby. That's what my preference would be. But she has to decide for herself what's best in this situation. It's not my place to say what's right or wrong. None of us are in a position to judge. And you certainly don't want the government getting involved in her personal life, do you?

Emily: Pam, it's not about that.

Pam: Consider the consequences, Emily. If abortion is made illegal, Sarah and girls like her will be forced to get dangerous illegal abortions. They'll get thrown in jail if caught. I can't even imagine that. And if they're raped, they'll be forced to give birth to a child that will forever remind them of that terrible event.

Emily: I still don't understand. How does any of that make abortion right?

Pam: Think about it, Emily. If your daughter gets in a tough spot, do you want her going to some guy with a rusty coat hanger in a back alley? You never know—she could get pregnant, like Sarah.

Emily: Let's hope not, but even if she does, right and wrong don't change just because we dislike the consequences of our choices. God might have something to say about this, you know.

Pam: Emily, don't think it can't happen to your kids or mine. I seem to remember both of us getting into some tough spots in college.

Emily: Yes, but . . .

Pam: So why should it be any different with our daughters? Besides, the Bible never says abortion is wrong. It doesn't even mention the word. I'm sure that's why my pastor never talks about it.

Emily: Wait . . . Are you saying the Bible is okay with abortion?

Pam: Again, I just don't think we should force our morals on others, and you aren't going to change my mind about that. Sarah has a right to make her own private decisions. Besides, how's she going to care for this baby anyway? There are so many abused and abandoned kids out there. Who's going to pay for them all? Besides, Sarah could become dirt-poor trying to raise this kid on her own. She needs to think about all this. It's not our place to judge her.

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Emily: Pam, let's talk about this later. Nothing I say right now will convince you.

Although the above conversation is contrived, the content of the exchange is very real. When it comes to abortion, many pro-life Christians don't know what to say. They're caught completely off-guard just like Emily was. Sure, they have pro-life convictions, but defending those convictions with friends and co-workers is another matter altogether. Better to stay silent and avoid embarrassment. Who wants to stir up a hornet's nest the way Emily did?

The good news is, you don't have to surrender in silence. There's a better way. Simplify the debate by focusing on the one question that truly matters: *What is the unborn?*

HIDDEN ASSUMPTIONS

Emily didn't realize it, but Pam was cheating. Not that Pam meant to—she was just repeating what she'd heard abortion-choice advocates say in the popular media. Nevertheless, she was cheating by assuming the very thing she was trying to prove.

Put simply, each of her objections *assumed* that the unborn are not human beings. However, instead of proving that conclusion with facts and arguments, she merely assumed it within the course of her rhetoric. We call this begging the question, and as Francis J. Beckwith points out, it's a logical fallacy that lurks behind many arguments for abortion.² For example, consider Pam's claim that we shouldn't force our views on others. Do you think she would say such a thing if someone wanted the right to choose to kill toddlers? There's no way. Only by assuming the unborn aren't human can she make such a claim. Or take her objection that government shouldn't get involved in our personal decisions. Can you imagine, even for a moment, Pam arguing this way if the topic were child abuse? Again her objection only flies if she assumes the unborn isn't already a child. If he is one, abortion is the worst kind of child abuse imaginable. Pam also asserts that if we restrict abortion, women will be forced to get dangerous back-alley abortions. We'll take up that specific objection in a later chapter, but notice that it, too, assumes that the unborn are not human. Otherwise she is claiming that

²Francis J. Beckwith, *Politically Correct Death: Answering Arguments for Abortion Rights* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 59.

because some people will die attempting to kill others, the state should make it safe and legal for them to do so.

I AGREE, IF . . .

Nadine Strossen is the former president of the ACLU, and I consider her a friend. She is pleasant, and I enjoy her company each time we debate. I wish more of my opponents were like her.

During a January 2008 Worldview Forum at Malone College (in Canton, Ohio), Nadine and I debated abortion in front of a full house of a thousand students, faculty, and others. The ACLU of Ohio even reserved one hundred seats in advance. This was our second debate in the course of a year. The theme of our exchange was “Abortion: Legal Right or Moral Wrong?”

The coin toss went to Nadine, which meant she got to speak first. She tried to frame the debate with an appeal to reproductive freedom. To paraphrase her case, reproductive freedom means the ability to choose whether or not to have children according to one’s own personal religious beliefs. That freedom is necessary if all persons are to lead lives of self-determination, opportunity, and human dignity. She repeatedly stressed our need to work together to reduce the high number of abortions, by which she meant pro-lifers should support tax-funded birth control programs.

Notice the question-begging nature of her claim. She simply assumed that the unborn are not human beings. Would she make this same claim for human freedom and self-determination if the debate were about killing toddlers instead of fetuses?

To help the audience see the problem, I began my own opening speech by saying the following (paraphrased for brevity):

Men and women, I agree completely with everything Nadine just said. She’s right that abortion is a personal, private matter that should not be restricted in any way. She’s right that we shouldn’t interfere with personal choices. She’s right that pro-lifers should stay out of this decision. Yes, I agree completely *if*. *If* what? If the unborn are not human beings. And if Nadine can demonstrate that the unborn are not members of the human family, I will concede this exchange, and so should everyone else who is pro-life.

Contrary to what some may think, the issue that divides Nadine and me is not that she is pro-choice and I am anti-choice. Truth is, I am

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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. So, again, the issue that separates Nadine and me is not that she is pro-choice and I am anti-choice. The issue that divides us is just one question: What is the unborn? Let me be clear: If the unborn is a human being, 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 through elective abortion requires no more justification than having your tooth pulled.

In short, I was willing to buy her argument for freedom and self-determination, but only if she could demonstrate that the unborn are not human beings. I then argued scientifically that the unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings, a case we’ll take up in the next chapter.

Framing the exchange around the status of the unborn set the tone for the entire evening and allowed me to ask good questions later in the debate. For example, during cross-examination I asked Nadine why the high number of abortions troubled her. After all, if abortion does not take the life of a defenseless human being, why worry about reducing it?

Notice that I made my case in two steps. First, I simplified the debate by focusing public attention on just one question: What is the unborn? Second, I argued for my pro-life view.

This two-part strategy is the same whether your audience has one person or a thousand. Consider Pam’s objection to Emily’s pro-life stance: “You certainly don’t want the government getting involved in Sarah’s personal life, do you?” Suppose Emily replied as follows: “Pam, if Sarah were talking about killing her toddler to solve a difficult life problem, would you object to the government telling her she can’t do that?” There’s no way Pam’s going to say yes. Instead, she’ll likely say, “Well, that’s different—it’s not the same thing.”

Oh, really? Not the same? How so? As you can see, Pam is assuming that the unborn are not human. Emily’s question exposed that assumption and

refocused the discussion on the status of the unborn. The strategy is clear: first simplify, then argue. Let's examine those two steps in more detail.

STEP #1: SIMPLIFY THE ISSUE

If you think a particular argument for elective abortion begs the question regarding the status of the unborn, here's how to clarify things: *Ask if this particular justification for abortion also works as a justification for killing toddlers.* If not, the argument assumes that the unborn are not fully human. I call this tactic "Trot out the Toddler," and it's illustrated in the dialogue below. The purpose is not to argue for the humanity of the unborn (you'll do that later) but to frame the debate around one question: What is the unborn?

Let's revisit the exchange between Pam and Emily. Pam justified abortion with an appeal to privacy. She also said that poor women can't afford any additional children. Again, only by assuming that the unborn are not human do these appeals have any force whatsoever. Here's how Emily might have clarified the issue and exposed Pam's hidden assumptions about the unborn:³

Emily: Pam, you say that privacy is the issue. Pretend that I have a two-year-old in front of me. (She holds out her hand at waist level to illustrate this.) May I kill him as long as I do it in the privacy of the bedroom?

Pam: That's silly—of course not!

Emily: Why not?

Pam: Because he's a human being.

Emily: Ah. If the unborn are human, like the toddler, we shouldn't kill the unborn in the name of privacy any more than we'd kill a toddler for that reason.

Pam: You're comparing apples with oranges, two things that are completely unrelated. Look, killing toddlers is one thing. Killing a fetus that is not a human being is quite another.

Emily: Ah. That's the issue, isn't it? Are the unborn human beings, like toddlers? That is the one issue that matters.

Pam: But many poor women cannot afford to raise another child.

Emily: When human beings get expensive, may we kill them? Getting back to my toddler example, suppose a large family collectively decides to

³Portions of this dialogue, with some modification, first appeared in Gregory Koukl and Scott Klusendorf, "The Vanishing Pro-Life Apologist," *Clear Thinking*, Spring 1999.

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quietly dispose of its three youngest children to help ease the family budget. Would this be okay?

Pam: Well, no, but aborting a fetus is not the same as killing children.

Emily: So once again the issue is, what is the unborn? Is the fetus the same as a human being? We can't escape that question, can we?

Again, notice that Emily has not yet argued for the humanity of the unborn or made any case for the pro-life view whatsoever. She'll do that later. For now all she's doing is framing the issue around one question: What is the unborn? That is the crux of the debate, and it clarifies many of the toughest questions, including the rape objection.

Pam: But what about a woman who's been raped? Every time she looks at that kid she's going to remember what happened to her. If that's not hardship, what is?

Emily: I agree that we should provide compassionate care for the victim, and it should be the best care possible. That's not at issue here. It's your proposed solution I'm struggling to understand. Tell me, how should a civil society treat innocent human beings who remind us of a painful event? (She pauses and lets the question sink in.) Is it okay to kill them so we can feel better? Can we, for example, kill a toddler who reminds her mother of a rape?

Pam: No, I wouldn't do that.

Emily: I wouldn't either. But again, isn't that because you and I both agree that it's wrong to kill innocent human beings, even if they do remind us of a painful event?

Pam: But you don't understand how much this woman has suffered. Put yourself in her shoes. How would you feel?

Emily: You're right. I don't understand her feelings. How could I? How could anyone? I'm just asking if hardship justifies homicide. Can we, for instance, kill toddlers who remind us of painful events? Again my claim here is really quite modest. If the unborn are members of the human family, like toddlers, we should not kill them to make someone else feel better. It's better to suffer evil rather than to inflict it.⁴ Personally, I wish I could give a different answer, but I can't without trashing the principle that my right to life shouldn't depend on how others feel about me. In the end, sometimes the right thing to do is not the easy thing to do. And what's right depends on the question, what is the unborn? We can't get around it.

⁴See Peter Kreeft, *The Unaborted Socrates* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983).

In this revised dialogue, Emily stays focused like a laser beam on the status of the unborn. She graciously yet incisively exposes the hidden assumptions in Pam's rhetoric, forcing each objection back to the question, what is the unborn? She doesn't let Pam distract her with appeals to privacy, economic hardship, or rape, all of which assume that the unborn are not human beings. She sticks to just one issue.

Until you clarify what's really at stake—namely, that we can't answer the question, can we kill the unborn? until we answer the question, what is the unborn?—there's no point advancing your case. Gregg Cunningham is correct. For too long the pro-life movement has been shouting conclusions rather than establishing facts.⁵ Staying focused on the status of the unborn brings moral clarity to the abortion debate. It allows you to engage friends and critics in conversation so that you do not talk past each other.

Admittedly, trotting out a toddler won't persuade everyone there's only one issue to resolve. Some abortion-choice advocates bite the bullet and concede the humanity of the unborn but justify elective abortion with an appeal to bodily autonomy. Judith Jarvis Thomson's famous violinist argument is a prime example of those who argue this way. I'll take up that particular objection later in chapter 15, but you won't hear it often outside academic circles. Most people on the street simply assume that the unborn are not human beings.

STEP #2: MAKE A CASE FOR LIFE

Once you've framed the discussion around the status of the unborn, you can present a basic case for the pro-life position. We'll explore that case in more detail in the next two chapters, but for now here's a summary of what that case looks like.

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, elective abortion requires no more justification than having a tooth pulled.

⁵Gregg Cunningham, the executive director of The Center for Bio-Ethical Reform, has said this in various public presentations; www.abortionno.org.

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Pro-life advocates defend their case using science and philosophy. Scientifically, they argue 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.⁶ For example, Keith L. Moore and T. V. N. Persaud write, “A zygote is the beginning of a new human being.”⁷

Philosophically, there is no morally significant difference between the embryo you once were and the adult you are today. As Stephen Schwarz points out using the acronym SLED, differences of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency are not relevant in the way that abortion advocates need them to be:⁸

Size: Yes, 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 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 fourteen-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. Remember, 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 valuable human beings, 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.

⁶See T. W. Sadler, *Langman's Embryology*, 5th ed. (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1993), 3; Keith L. Moore and T. V. N. Persaud, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1998), 2–18; Ronan O'Rahilly and Fabiola Müller, *Human Embryology and Teratology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley-Liss, 1996), 8, 29.

⁷Moore and Persaud, *The Developing Human*, 2.

⁸Stephen Schwarz, *The Moral Question of Abortion* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990), 18. The SLED test was initially suggested by Schwarz but is modified and explained here by me.

In short, pro-life advocates contend 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.

IS KILLING ALWAYS WRONG?

Let me clarify two points. First, the pro-life view is not that it's always wrong to take human life, a position only a strict pacifist would hold. Our view is that it's always wrong to take human life without proper justification, and we believe (for reasons we'll discuss in this book) that elective abortion does just that.

Francis J. Beckwith outlines a basic pro-life syllogism as follows:

1. The unborn entity, from the moment of conception, is a full-fledged member of the human community.
2. It is *prima facie* morally wrong to kill any member of that community.
3. Every successful abortion kills an unborn entity, a full-fledged member of the human community.
4. Therefore, every successful abortion is *prima facie* morally wrong.⁹

By “full-fledged member of the human community” (premise #1), Beckwith means that the unborn are the same kind of being as you and I and thus have the same basic rights we do. True, they differ from us in terms of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency, but these differences are not morally relevant to their status as human beings. Thus, depriving them of life requires the same strict justification needed for killing a ten-year-old or any other human being. Note again that he is not arguing we can never take human life, only that it's *prima facie* wrong to do so, meaning that under normal circumstances we are not justified in killing another human being. That last point is a key distinction, one often missed by some abortion-choice advocates who insist that pro-lifers are inconsistent for opposing elective abortion but not opposing the death penalty, the killing of animals, or war. In this case, the abortion-choice advocate is attacking a straw man. As stated above, most pro-lifers do not say it's always wrong to take life, but that it's always wrong to take human life *without* justification.

⁹Francis J. Beckwith, *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xii. In using the term “successful” abortion, Beckwith is not saying unsuccessful abortions are morally permissible.

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We believe elective abortion takes human life without justification, and thus we oppose it.

Second, by elective abortion I mean those abortions *not* medically necessary to save the mother's physical life. As reported in the journal *International Family Planning Perspectives*, the vast majority of abortions worldwide are *not* done for medical necessity but to delay giving birth:

[T]he most commonly reported reason women cite for having an abortion is to postpone or stop childbearing. The second most common reason—socioeconomic concerns—includes disruption of education or employment; lack of support from the father; desire to provide schooling for existing children; and poverty, unemployment or inability to afford additional children. In addition, relationship problems with a husband or partner and a woman's perception that she is too young constitute other important categories of reasons. Women's characteristics are associated with their reasons for having an abortion: With few exceptions, older women and married women are the most likely to identify limiting childbearing as their main reason for abortion.¹⁰

Abortion clinic workers have acknowledged the “elective” nature of their trade for years. Dr. Warren Hern, whose 1984 book *Abortion Practice* is the standard medical teaching text on late-term abortion procedures, writes:

A study of motivations for abortion has found that the majority are sought for socioeconomic reasons. Women seeking abortions seldom give the real reason for doing so to investigators studying the issue. The impression from clinical practice is that all but a few women seek abortions for reasons that can broadly be defined as socioeconomic, and many cite strictly economic reasons. . . . As a rule, women do not make decisions about pregnancy prevention or treatment on the basis of statistical evaluations and medical advice but rather on the basis of personal attitudes and necessities. At times medical considerations enter into the picture, but decisions are usually made on the basis of such factors as desire or lack of desire for parenthood, stability of relationships, educational status, emotional status, or economic status, among others.¹¹

¹⁰Akinrinola Bankole, Susheela Singh, and Taylor Haas, “Reasons Why Women Have Induced Abortions: Evidence from 27 Countries,” *International Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 24, No. 3, September 1998.

¹¹Warren Hern, *Abortion Practice* (Boulder, CO: Alpenglo Graphics, 1990), 10, 39. During the 1995 Congressional debate over partial-birth abortion (clinically termed “Intact D&X abortion”), opponents of a proposed ban on the procedure asserted it was rarely performed and was used only in extreme cases when a woman's life was at risk or the fetus suffered from severe anomalies. However, Ron Fitzsimmons, executive

Suppose, however, that the pregnancy does in fact pose a grave threat to the mother's life. What is the morally correct way to proceed?

Ectopic pregnancy (EP) is a clear case in point. With EP, the developing human embryo implants somewhere other than the uterus, usually on the inner wall of the fallopian tube. This is an extremely dangerous situation for the mother. When the EP outgrows the limits of the narrow fallopian tube enclosing it, the tube bursts, resulting in massive internal hemorrhaging. In fact, EP is the leading cause of pregnancy-related death during the first trimester.¹² The accepted medical protocols in this case are to end the pregnancy through chemical (Methotrexate) or surgical intervention.¹³ There is no way the developing human can survive EP. If the mother dies from internal bleeding, the embryo dies also, given he's too young to survive on his own. At the same time, the limits of current medical technology do not allow transfer to a more suitable environment. Despite our best intentions, we simply can't save the child.

What is the greatest moral good we can achieve in this situation? Is it best to do nothing and let two humans (likely) die, or is it best to act in such a way that we save one life even though the unintended and unavoidable consequence of acting is the death of the human embryo?

Pro-life advocates almost universally agree we should do the latter. It is better to save one life than lose two. Notice, however, that the *intent* of the physician is not to directly kill the embryo but to save the mother's life. The unintended and unavoidable consequence of that lifesaving act is the death of the embryo. Perhaps in the future we can transplant the embryo to a more desirable location. If that day comes, we should do that. But for now, ending the pregnancy is our only course of action. If we do nothing, both mother and child die. It's best that one should live. But again, notice that the intent in ending the pregnancy is to save the mother, not directly and purposefully to kill the child.¹⁴

As for other alleged threats to the mother's life, few are truly life-

director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers, later admitted that not only was the actual number of partial-birth procedures much higher than he originally stated but that his own contacts with many of the physicians performing these procedures indicated that the vast majority were done on healthy mothers carrying healthy fetuses. Diane Gianelli, "Abortion Rights Leader Urges End to 'Half Truths,'" *American Medical News*, March 3, 1997.

¹²T. E. Goldner, H. W. Lawson, Z. Xia, H. K. Atrash, "Surveillance for Ectopic Pregnancy—United States, 1970–1989," *MMWR CDC Surveillance Summaries* 42 (6) (December 1993): 73–85.

¹³Eric Daiter, MD, "Ectopic Pregnancy: Overview," *Obgyn.net*, <http://www.obgyn.net/women/women.asp?page=/pb/cotm/9902/9902>.

¹⁴As a result, some pro-life advocates think we should avoid the term *abortion* in this case because the intent is radically different from abortions performed for socioeconomic reasons.

threatening. Most can be managed with proper physician oversight. Dr. Thomas Murphy Goodwin oversees the largest high-risk pregnancy clinic in the United States, averaging between fifteen thousand to sixteen thousand births annually. Excluding cases diagnosed late in pregnancy, only one or two cases a year pose an immediate lethal threat to the mother's life. Goodwin writes that even women suffering from cancer can often be treated with chemotherapy, and the fetus tolerates the treatment.¹⁵

SUMMARY: STAY HITCHED TO YOUR TODDLER

Again, whenever you hear an argument for elective abortion, stop and ask this question: Would this justification for killing the unborn work for killing a toddler? If not, your critic is assuming that the unborn aren't human, a point for which he needs to argue. Trot out your toddler to expose the hidden (and perhaps unrecognized) assumptions in the argument.

You may need to do this more than once. Your critic may toss numerous objections your way, none of which address the status of the unborn. You'll hear about rape, severely disabled kids, economic hardship, foster care problems, child abuse, and every other hard-case scenario imaginable. Be gracious, but don't fall for it. Keep trotting out your toddler. Stay focused on the one question that really matters: What is the unborn? Until that question is answered, everything else is a distraction.

Finally, remember that arguments are seldom won on the spot. Even after you make a compelling case for the pro-life view, critics—even intelligent ones—may balk. That shouldn't surprise us. Let's be honest: How many of us upon hearing a powerful rejoinder to one of our most cherished beliefs immediately concedes the point? To the contrary, we typically fight on. Thus, if the argument is won, it's won later when your critic is alone with his thoughts and quietly abandons his former position.

Conservative columnist and expert debater William Rusher writes that a genuine change of mind on a subject important to us can be painful:

Nobody, when confronted with a really devastating argument against something in which he has hitherto deeply believed, slaps himself on the thigh and shouts, "By gosh, I never thought of that!" On the contrary, the blow will be resented. Very often it will be sustained in obstinate silence. The ego needs time to marshal its defenses—either to try to restore the

¹⁵Thomas Murphy Goodwin, "Medicalizing Abortion Decisions," *First Things*, March 1996; http://www.firstthings.com/article.php3?id_article=3835.

toppled idol, or to come to terms with the toppling, or (at the very least) to regain its own shattered composure.

It is precisely then, however—in the silent weeks or months after the argument, when perhaps no one else is present and the defeated arguer confronts only himself in the recollection of his defeat—that the argument may truly be said to be “won.” Because then, if ever, is when the loser of the argument will tacitly abandon his former position. He may never admit to having changed his mind at all; but at the very least he will have rearranged his mental furniture, to insure that he does not hereafter sit, so often or so heavily, on that all too demonstrably fragile chair.¹⁶

Don't worry that you can't change everyone's mind. Truth is, hard-core abortion-choicers are not your primary customers. You're after the 60 percent of Americans in the mushy middle who think of themselves as “pro-choice” because they've never thought seriously about the choice they're advocating. Your job is to bring clarification and get them thinking. Just keep trotting out your toddler.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do pro-lifers contend about abortion? How does this help simplify the debate?
2. Why is the pro-choice/anti-choice distinction misleading?
3. In what ways are pro-lifers pro-choice? When it comes to choosing abortion, what makes that choice right or wrong?
4. Why do appeals to privacy and choice miss the point in the abortion debate?
5. What does *begging the question* mean? Why is this a logical fallacy?
6. What assumption seems to lurk behind many of the typical defenses for abortion?
7. How does “trotting out the toddler” help simplify the debate? What is its primary purpose?
8. A friend says, “Poor women cannot afford another child and should therefore have a right to an abortion.” What is she assuming about the unborn? Use a *trot out the toddler* example to show that the status of the unborn is the real issue in the debate, not the poverty of the mother.
9. When abortion advocates argue for abortion in cases of rape, what are they assuming about the unborn? What question can you ask to expose that assumption?

¹⁶William Rusher, *How to Win Arguments More Often than Not* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 44–45.

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10. When pro-life advocates say it's a *prima facie* wrong to take human life, what do they mean?
11. What does William Rusher say about winning arguments?

HELPFUL RESOURCES

- Randy Alcorn. *Why Pro-Life?: Caring for the Unborn and Their Mothers*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2004.
- Scott Klusendorf. *Pro-Life 101: A Step by Step Guide to Making Your Case Persuasively*. Signal Hill, CA: Stand to Reason Press, 2002.
- Gregory Koukl. *Precious Unborn Human Persons*. Signal Hill, CA: Stand to Reason Press, 1997. (Call 1-800-2-REASON to order, or visit www.str.org.)
- Gregory Koukl and Scott Klusendorf. *Making Abortion Unthinkable: The Art of Pro-Life Persuasion*. Signal Hill, CA: Stand to Reason Press, 2001.
- Peter Kreeft. *The Unaborted Socrates: A Dramatic Debate on the Issues Surrounding Abortion*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983.