

## 2015 Clarkson Academy—Part 1 Lecture Notes

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Successful pro-life apologists present their case in four steps. First, they clarify the debate, clearing away distractions. Second, they make a compelling case for life using science and philosophy. Third, they answer objections convincingly. Fourth, they teach and equip.

Why this course matters:

1. We honor God by defending our faith. Our goal is to give people something to think about.
2. In pregnancy center work, clients bring their worldview to abortion decisions.
3. Given the cultural landscape, we are all apologists now.

### Step #1: Clarify the Debate

The pro-life argument (Syllogism):

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

P2: Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being.

P3: Therefore, abortion is wrong.

Define your terms: Abortion is the intentional killing of a human fetus. Many critics agree:

1. Ronald Dworkin: Abortion is “deliberately killing a developing human embryo” and is a choice for death.
2. Camille Paglia: “Hence I have always frankly admitted that abortion is murder, the extermination of the powerless by the powerful. Liberals for the most part have shrunk from facing the ethical consequences of their embrace of abortion, which results in the annihilation of concrete individuals and not just clumps of insensate tissue.”
3. Former Planned Parenthood President Faye Wattleton: “Any pretense that abortion is not killing is a signal of our ambivalence, a signal that we cannot say yes, it kills a fetus.”
4. Dr. Warren Hern, author of *Abortion Practice*—“We have reached a point in this particular technology [D&E abortion] where there is no possibility of denying an act of destruction. It is before one’s eyes. The sensations of dismemberment flow through the current like an electric current.”

What the abortion debate is *not* about:

1. Gender politics—Arguments stand or fall based on validity/soundness, not gender.
2. Preaching to the choir—People can and do change their minds on abortion.
3. Side issues—Stay focused!

Remember the pro-life syllogism:

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

P2: Elective abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being.

P3: Therefore, elective abortion is wrong.

Filter out everything unrelated to that syllogism. For example:

- (a) Margaret Sanger was a racist—Perhaps so, but adds little to your case.
- (b) Women regret abortion—Many don’t, and even if they did, that doesn’t make it wrong.
- (c) Abortion is dangerous to mothers—Again, not central to your case even if true.
- (d) A contraception mentality leads to abortion mentality—Talk about contraception another time; stay focused on the intentional killing of unborn humans.
- (e) Only preaching the Gospel will end abortion—That’s false. Slavery and racial segregation didn’t end that way. It’s also God-limiting.

Replace side issues with topics that relate directly to your syllogism, which we will explore in this course:

- (f) What is the nature of moral reasoning? It's objective not subjective.
  - (g) What is the unborn? The unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings.
  - (h) What is abortion? It's the intentional killing of an innocent human being.
  - (i) What makes humans valuable? Humans are valuable by nature not function.
  - (j) What are the strongest objections to my case and why don't they work?
  - (k) What is the fix if I've had an abortion? The gospel is the cure for wounded souls.
4. Judging people—We can judge acts while withholding personal judgments.
  5. Primacy of stories—Personal stories don't trump moral principle.
  6. Tolerance—claiming no one is right is not tolerance; it's relativism.
  7. Bad religion—Arguments are true or false, valid or invalid. Calling an argument "religious" is a category error.

In short, the abortion debate is not about a surgical procedure, but a far deeper question: Who counts as one of us?

The loss of moral meaning:

1. Joe Biden and John Kerry quotes—each distorts the nature of moral reasoning, confusing preference claims with moral ones.
2. Imagine saying, "Don't like slavery? Don't own a slave!" Pro-life advocates don't oppose abortion because they find it distasteful; they oppose it because it violates rational moral principles.

History—how we got to a loss of moral meaning. It didn't happen overnight:

1. Moral realism of Old and New Testament writers: Morals are grounded in God's holy character.
2. Moral realism of the Greeks: Morals are grounded in the world of forms (ideals) or the soul.
3. Moral realism of Thomas Aquinas: Morals are grounded in man's rational soul, which bears the image of his creator.
4. Empirical shift of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Hume, Kant, Hobbs): All knowledge restricted to the five senses. Thus, morals are mere passions. Even if morals do exist, we can't know them as such because we are trapped behind our sense perceptions (Kant).
5. Post-modern turn of 20<sup>th</sup> century: Morals reduced to language construction. We literally create reality by talking about it in our language communities.

Responses to the loss of moral meaning:

1. Naturalistic (atheistic) ethics—Objective morals exist as brute facts. No need for God to ground them. However, objective moral laws require an objective moral Law-Giver. In a universe that came from nothing and was caused by nothing, moral rules lack authority
2. Christian Postmodernism—all knowledge is received through one's cultural lenses, thus, we can be certain of nothing. However, CPM suffers from a number of flaws:
  - (a) Problem of access: How can CPMs know we can't see the world as it really is given their claim that no one has privileged access to what is real?
  - (b) Problem of misplaced community—Which is the relevant one?
  - (c) Problem of misplaced bias—CPMs confuse psychological objectivity with rational objectivity.
  - (d) Problem of foundations—"Bombproof certainty" is an unrealistic and irrational standard for knowledge.
  - (e) Problem of transcendence—Is God merely a construct of our language community? If so, why revere Him?
  - (f) Problem of theology—Is the gospel true or merely constructed? (1 Cor. 15)
3. Relativism—Right and wrong are determined either by one's society or the individual. There are no objective standards we ought to get in line with. Types of relativism: 1) Society-does relativism asserts that because people disagree, nobody is right. 2) Society-says relativism reduces morality to a social contract, meaning moral-reformers are evil by definition. 3) I-say relativism says right and wrong are up to the individual, meaning there can be no such thing as an evil individual. Relativism has other major problems:

- (a) Relativism is self-refuting. It insists there are no moral rules, yet it advances tolerance.
- (b) Relativism can't say why anything is wrong, including intolerance.
- (c) Relativism is unlivable: Relativists complain when you push their hot buttons.
- (d) Relativism is not neutral. (Strossen debate case study)

Relativism discussion #1: University of Maryland student Greg Dickinson responds to a pro-life display in the school newspaper—In what ways is his view self-refuting? Circle words and phrases that give us clues.

After seeing the gruesome display on Hornbake Mall, I was once again reminded why I am pro-choice. Abortion is a horrible act that should only be reserved for when the health of the mother is in danger or when the circumstances of impregnation were brutal. However, to me this argument is brushed aside. As a gay student who grew up in a conservative area, I know firsthand what it is like to be judged, harassed, humiliated and denied the basic rights to marry the one I love and have a family. These are rights that I feel are *universal*, but conservative moralists have denied me of them. This is why I have developed an unwavering, *uncompromising* belief that personal morals *must* be kept personal, because no matter how strong my personal beliefs are, *I would never have my moral convictions pressed upon another person*. Our entire society is built on choice, and it is this freedom of choice that *must* be respected and preserved. (Emphasis added)

Relativism discussion #2: In our October 2009 debate at the University of North Carolina, Nadine Strossen, former President of the ACLU (1991-2008), defended her case for elective abortion with an appeal to relativism. To summarize her case:

Reproductive freedom means the freedom to choose whether or not to have children. Laws restricting abortion unjustly curtail that freedom and impose the religious beliefs of some on others who disagree. "Our individual principles of morality cannot control our judicial decisions," she told the audience. "Our obligation is to liberty. We must respect freedom of conscience that allows women a right to choose." True, she did say that pro-lifers are free to believe what they wish about abortion, but, citing *Roe v. Wade*, she insisted "the State should not enter the private realm of family life. Government must remain neutral." She concluded by quoting the Supreme Court's famous "mystery passage" in the 1992 Casey decision. "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

Setting aside for the moment that each of her above claims *assumed* the unborn were not human—for example, would she make this same pitch for personal choice and freedom if the topic were killing toddlers instead of fetuses?—her appeal to relativism was seriously flawed. Discuss:

- Why is *state* neutrality on abortion impossible?
- Why is her appeal to *moral* neutrality unconvincing?
- What words indicate she's not neutral?
- What does she want pro-lifers to do?

Relativism discussion #3: Faye Wattleton, former President of Planned Parenthood—read and discuss:

Like most parents, I think that a sense of moral responsibility is one of the greatest gifts I can give my child. But teaching morality doesn't mean imposing my moral values on others. It means sharing wisdom, giving reasons for believing as I do--and then trusting others to think and judge for themselves. My parents' morals were deeply rooted in religious conviction but tempered by tolerance--the essence of which is respect for other people's views. They taught me that reasonable people may differ on moral issues, and that fundamental respect for others is morality of the highest order. I have devoted my career to ensuring a world in which my daughter, Felicia, can inherit that legacy. I hope the tolerance and respect I show her as a parent is reinforced by the work she sees me doing every day: fighting for the right of all individuals to make their own moral decisions about childbearing.

Seventy-five years ago, Margaret Sanger founded Planned Parenthood to liberate individuals from the 'mighty engines of repression.' As she wrote, 'The men and women of America are demanding that...they be allowed to mold their lives, not at the arbitrary command of church or state but as their conscience and judgment may dictate.' I'm proud to continue that struggle, to defend the rights of all people to their own beliefs. When others try to inflict their views on me, my daughter or anyone else, that's not morality: It's tyranny. It's unfair, and it's un-American.

- Does Wattleton trust people to think and judge for themselves?
- What does Wattleton mean by "tolerance?"
- To what extent is her own view anything but neutral?
- What does call people who disagree with her?

Relativism discussion #4 Video clips from students at UGA—Note the unwillingness to make moral judgments.

4. Utilitarianism—The morality of an act is determined by the consequences that follow from it—namely, does it produce the greatest good for the greatest number? Problems:
  - (a) Some acts are wrong in themselves (torturing toddlers for fun).
  - (b) Incomplete theory: Utilitarianism can't define "good" without borrowing from other systems.
  - (c) Fails to give guidance on decision making. (It can't calculate greatest good.)
  - (d) Consequences of an act are difficult to measure.
  - (e) Who decides what is useful/good?

In a world that's lost moral meaning, we begin by exposing assumptions.

1. C.S. Lewis—The most dangerous ideas are simply assumed, not stated.
2. Example from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: Huck's excuse to Aunt Sally for why he is late for dinner:

"We blowed out a cylinder head."

"Good gracious! Anybody hurt?"

"No'm. Killed a nigger."

"Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt."

3. The assumption the unborn are not human lurks behind most claims for abortion.
4. At the street level, many justifications for abortion assume the unborn are not human. In so doing, these objections are question-begging. That is, they assume what they are trying to prove. The following objections are all question-begging. They fail unless you begin with the assumption the unborn are not human—which is the very point under dispute in the abortion controversy.
  - (a) *Anti-choicers don't trust women* to make their own personal choices.—If parents want to rough up their toddler in the privacy of the bedroom, should we trust them to make their own personal choices?
  - (b) *Anti-choicers want to force poor women* to bring another child into this world.—When human beings get expensive, may we kill them?
  - (c) *If abortion is restricted, women will die in back alleys* from illegal abortions.—So, because some people may die attempting to intentionally kill others, the state should make it safe and legal for them to do so? Why should the law be faulted for making it more risky for one human to intentionally kill another, completely innocent one?
  - (d) *Anti-choicers want raped women to suffer* painful memories.—How should a civil society treat innocent human beings who remind us of a painful event? Is it okay to kill them so we can feel better?
  - (e) *Restricting abortion is unfair to poor women* who, unlike rich women, can't afford to travel to places where abortion is legal.—Argument assumes abortion is a moral good poor women will be denied. However, since when is equal opportunity to intentionally kill an innocent human being a moral good? "The vices of the wealthy are not virtues simply because the poor are denied them" (Beckwith).
  - (f) *Abortion is needed to control overpopulation* and preserve scarce resources.—Why not kill toddlers or teenagers who consume allegedly scarce resources?

- (g) *Abortion is needed to prevent child abuse.*—Should we kill two-year olds to prevent the abuse of five-year olds?
- (h) *Abortion allows women freedom to pursue careers.*—Can we kill toddlers who interfere with a mother’s education or career?
- (i) *Abortion prevents unwanted children.*—The homeless are unwanted; may we kill them? The objection falls on its head unless you assume the unborn are not human.
- (j) *Restricting abortion imposes religious belief* on those who disagree.—If a secular state decides protecting teenagers is an imposition of religion, should killing teenagers be legal?
- (k) *Laws against abortion impose morality.*—Would you say the same thing about laws against killing toddlers?
- (l) *Abortion is needed to prevent disabled children.*—Since when are damaged humans non-humans? Is it okay to kill handicapped two-year olds?

5. Use “trot out the toddler” to clarify the issue and expose assumptions about the unborn:

- (a) Ask if any of the reasons given for elective abortion justify killing a toddler.
- (b) If not, the argument assumes the unborn are not human, meaning it begs the question.
- (c) Notice you are not yet making a case for the humanity of the unborn. (You’ll do that later.) Rather, you are simply clarifying the issue.

Begging the question discussion #1: Debate with Nadine Strossen—As noted above, Nadine’s primary appeal was 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. In what ways is her appeal question-begging regarding the status of the unborn?

Begging the question discussion #2: Read the article below by Ted Peters and Gaymon Bennett, “Theological Support of Stem Cell Research,” *The Scientist* 15[17]:4, Sep. 3, 2001— In what ways is the article question-begging in that it assumes the unborn are not human? (Do not read commentary below article until after classroom discussion.)

Pope John Paul II has stated that support of embryonic stem cell research evidences moral corruption. Opponents of embryonic stem cell research have cast the debate surrounding this research as nothing but the next chapter in the abortion controversy. The ethical issues involved with this research, however, are far too complex to be reduced to such a simple assessment. Portraying the stem cell debate as the abortion controversy is at best intellectually misleading, at worst ethically negligent.

The stem cell debate has been framed by the wrong basic question: its moral heart lies not with abortion, but in its potential good. Stem cell research is morally significant first because it promises healing. Implanted stem cells, it appears, teach the body to heal itself, rejuvenating failing tissues, from organs to nerves. These therapies promise to ease the suffering of millions inflicted with such debilitating diseases as Parkinson’s, heart and liver failure, juvenile diabetes, Alzheimer’s, and cancer.

It is our considered judgment that not only is this research morally permissible, there is an ethical and theological mandate to actively support it. To not support stem cell research, we have concluded, is unethical. The principal grounding of our support is beneficence, a bioethical variant of the Christian understanding of agape love.

Theological and ethical reflection are at their best when framed by beneficence--a selfless love of one’s neighbor that inspires struggle against suffering and death. Beneficence asks: Does stem cell research further or hinder the betterment and well being of humanity? The answer is yes; this form of scientific research promises enormous leaps in the quality of health care.

For those who follow Jesus of Nazareth, decisive here is the Nazarene's ministry of healing. The Christian doctrine of salvation includes healing of body and soul. We human beings emulate God when we engage in our own ministry of healing. Medical research, in its own way, contributes to God's healing work on Earth.

The destruction of embryos for this research is not irrelevant to our ethical considerations. We must ask a question: when does life begin? Or better, when does morally relevant personhood begin? In *Donum Vitae* in 1987 the Vatican declared that at conception three components make a full human being: sperm, egg, and a divinely implanted soul. However, with advances in embryology such as nuclear transfer, scientific understanding of what it takes to make a human individual is changing. Before ethical conclusions on the status of the embryo are drawn, theologians and ethicists must study this rapidly advancing science.

The embryo is a potential human being, to be sure; respect for the early embryo shows our respect for God's intended future destiny. As such we do not support research that would lead to the wholesale fabrication of embryos for research purposes. Rather, we support research that uses stem cell lines derived from embryos taken from fertilization labs. In the deep freezes of these clinics are thousands of embryos slated for destruction. Society has decided to engage in reproductive technology. Excess embryos exist in large numbers. These surplus embryos will never find connection to a mother's womb, never become a human being.

Is it ethically licit to take surplus embryos and press them into the service of life-saving medical research? Armed with the principle of beneficence we want to answer, yes. So ethically central is the principle of beneficence that those who ignore its invocation in the stem cell debate owe it to the public to justify opposition to the advance of medical research.

We might recall Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. In this story a robbed and beaten man is left on the side of the road to die. Priests pass by on the other side of the road, avoiding offering aid. A Samaritan happens along the road, carries the suffering one to the next town and pays for his health care. Confronted by suffering, the Samaritan chooses agape in the form of beneficence. Reducing the stem cell debate to the abortion controversy, we allow the unnamed suffering man--suffering from heart disease, Alzheimer's, or cancer--to die without aid.

The question-begging nature of the above editorial is easy to spot. Over and over again, the authors simply *assume* the embryo is not human. Consider the following claims:

- (a) *"The stem cell debate has been framed by the wrong basic question: its moral heart lies not with abortion, but in its potential good. Stem cell research is morally significant first because it promises healing." Healing to whom? Are the embryos in question healed by this research? Is it "good" for them? Suppose the issue was destroying two-year olds to cure five-year olds. Would the authors suggest we ignore our moral qualms and focus only on the alleged cures? Only by assuming the embryos are not human does their argument work.*
- (b) *"Theological and ethical reflection are at their best when framed by beneficence--a selfless love of one's neighbor that inspires struggle against suffering and death." Is the embryo my neighbor? Does destructive embryo research further his well being? Authors beg the question here and simply assume the embryo is not one of us.*
- (c) *"Beneficence asks: Does stem cell research further or hinder the betterment and well being of humanity?" Again, the authors beg the question. Are embryos members of the human family? If so, killing them to benefit others is a serious moral wrong.*
- (d) *"For those who follow Jesus of Nazareth, decisive here is the Nazarene's ministry of healing. The Christian doctrine of salvation includes healing of body and soul. We human beings emulate God when we engage in our own ministry of healing. Medical research, in its own way, contributes to God's healing work on Earth." Again, does killing embryos for research "heal" them? And does medical research untempered by morality contribute to God's healing work? What about the Tuskegee experiments of the 1920s in which*

Black men suffering from Syphilis were promised treatment only to have it denied so scientists could study the disease?

- (e) *“The destruction of embryos for this research is not irrelevant to our ethical considerations. We must ask a question: when does life begin? Or better, when does morally relevant personhood begin?”* This is truly remarkable. Notice how quickly the authors ditch the scientific question—“When does life begin?”—for a purely subjective one—“When does morally relevant personhood begin?” The authors worship science when it suits them (when talking about alleged cures), but ignore it when the humanity of the unborn is at issue.
- (f) *“The embryo is a potential human being, to be sure; respect for the early embryo shows our respect for God’s intended future destiny. As such we do not support research that would lead to the wholesale fabrication of embryos for research purposes.”* Why not? If the embryos in question are not human beings, why not create them solely for destructive research? If they are not human, killing them for research requires no more justification than pulling a tooth.
- (g) *“Rather, we support research that uses stem cell lines derived from embryos taken from fertilization labs. In the deep freezes of these clinics are thousands of embryos slated for destruction.”* The reasoning here is vacuous. All of us die sometime. Do those of us who are going to die later have the right to kill and exploit those who will die sooner? Death-row inmates are slated for die. May we kill them to harvest their organs? Again, only by assuming the unborn are not human does the argument work.
- (h) *“Is it ethically licit to take surplus embryos and press them into the service of life-saving medical research? Armed with the principle of beneficence we want to answer, yes.”* But armed with science—which establishes the humanity of the embryo—and objective morality—which says we shouldn’t kill one human so another can benefit—the answer is no. We do not have a right to kill living, distinct human beings to benefit other people.
- (i) *“We might recall Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan. In this story a robbed and beaten man is left on the side of the road to die. Priests pass by on the other side of the road, avoiding offering aid. A Samaritan happens along the road, carries the suffering one to the next town and pays for his health care. Confronted by suffering, the Samaritan chooses agape in the form of beneficence. Reducing the stem cell debate to the abortion controversy, we allow the unnamed suffering man--suffering from heart disease, Alzheimer’s, or cancer--to die without aid.”* This misses the point entirely. The parable of the Good Samaritan does not establish the so-called “principle of beneficence” as defined by the authors, but refutes it. Central to the parable is the fact that a man was unjustly beaten so that other people (thieves) could benefit from his demise. Only the Samaritan set aside his own self-interest (benefit) to perform his moral duty to one who was vulnerable and defenseless. If the embryo is a human being, a point the authors scarcely entertain much less refute, their place in the story is that of the thieves who rob from one human being to benefit another.

Again, imagine if the above article advocated killing two-year olds to treat five-year olds. Would anyone today justify the author’s rationale?

Begging the question discussion #3: Katha Pollitt, from *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*—In what ways does Pollitt assume the unborn are not human?

Abortion is often seen as a bad thing for society, a sign of hedonism, materialism, and hyperindividualism. I argue that, on the contrary, access to legal abortion is a good thing for society and helping a woman obtain one is a good deed. Instead of shaming women for ending a pregnancy, we should acknowledge their realism and self-knowledge. We should accept that it’s good for everyone if women have only the children they want and can raise well. Society benefits when women can commit to education and work and dreams without having at the back of their mind a concern that maybe it’s all provisional because at any moment an accidental pregnancy could derail them for life. It’s good for children to be wanted, and to come into this life when their parents are ready for them.”

Begging the question discussion #4: Nadine Strossen debate clip —In what ways does she 1) reframe the debate around things is not about, and 2) assume the unborn are not human?

6. Your soundbite for framing the abortion debate around the status of the unborn:

*Men and women, I agree completely with everything Ms. Pollitt 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 Ms. Pollitt 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 Ms. Pollitt and me is not that she is pro-choice and I am anti-choice. Truth is, I am vigorously "pro-choice" when it comes to women choosing a number of moral goods. I support a woman's right to choose her own health care provider, to choose her own school, to choose her own husband, to choose her own job, to choose her own religion, and to choose her own career, to name a few. These are among the many choices that I fully support for the women of our country. But some choices are wrong, like killing innocent human beings simply because they are in the way and cannot defend themselves. No, we shouldn't be allowed to choose that. So, again, the issue that separates us 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?*

What is the unborn? Embryology—the stubborn facts:

1. From the earliest stages of development, the unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings. Modern embryology textbooks, as well as academic defenders of abortion, affirm this:
  - (a) Keith Moore, *The Developing Human*—A zygote is the beginning of a new human being.
  - (b) T.W. Sadler, *Langman's Embryology*—The development of a human beings with fertilization, a process by which the sperm from the male and the oocyte from the female unite to give rise to a new organism, the zygote.
  - (c) Editorial in *California Medicine*, 9/70—"Since the old ethic has not yet been fully displaced it has been necessary to separate the idea of abortion from the idea of killing, which continues to be socially abhorrent. The result has been a curious avoidance of the scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception and is continuous whether intra-or extra-uterine until death. The very considerable semantic gymnastics which are required to rationalize abortion as anything but taking a human life would be ludicrous if they were not often put forth under socially impeccable auspices. It is suggested that this schizophrenic sort of subterfuge is necessary because while a new ethic is being accepted the old one has not yet been rejected."
  - (d) Peter Singer in *Practical Ethics*—"Whether a being is a member of 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."
  - (e) David Boonin in *A Defense of Abortion*—"A human fetus, after all, is simply a human being at a very early stage in his or her development."
2. Objections and replies:
  - (a) Twining—Just because an organism may split doesn't mean it wasn't a whole entity (flatworm example). A twin can be formed from any one of our cells. Does it follow we are not human? If the early embryo is just a hunk of cells and not a whole living organism, why don't each of its cells develop individually into new entities? Instead, they function together for the benefit of the whole of which they are a part.
  - (b) Miscarriage—How does it follow that because nature spontaneously triggers a miscarriage, that 1) the embryos in question were not human, and 2) I may intentionally kill them? Earthquakes kill thousands in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries, but that does not justify mass murder.
  - (c) Sperm and egg are alive—This objection confuses parts with wholes. Sperm and egg are parts of larger human beings and they die in the act of fertilization. The embryo is already an integrated organism.

- (d) Women don't grieve miscarriages—How does my feelings about something change what it is? Suppose I grieve the death of my own child more than the hundreds who die in poor nations. Is my child more human than those children?
- (e) Burning research lab—How does it follow that because I save one human over others, the ones I leave behind are not fully human? Moreover, who we choose to save doesn't prove who we can kill.
- (f) Embryos are mere clumps of cells—Embryos function as coordinated organisms and develop themselves from within. Mere clumps of cells do no such thing. (Corpse example)
- (g) Molar pregnancies—they don't start off as embryos and morph into tumors. They never were complete organisms from the start (Alphabet Song example).
- (h) No absolutes in embryology, only judgment calls—including that one? Claim is self-refuting. Moreover, if we don't know if the unborn are human, we shouldn't be killing them.
- (i) People disagree on when life begins—How does it follow that because people disagree, nobody is right? If disagreement means nobody is right, the abortion-chooser's position is refuted because pro-lifers disagree.
- (j) Appearance: The embryo doesn't look human—The question is *not* what an entity looks like, but what it is. Mannequins look human but aren't remotely so while the Elephant Man didn't look human but was. We have a long history of defining people out of existence who don't look like us. As recent as 1906, eugenicists and racial anthropologists at the Bronx Zoological Gardens encouraged an African Pygmy—Ota Benga—to play in a cage with a monkey. (Stith's Jaguar and Corvette examples)
- (k) The early embryo relies on maternal RNA—The embryo uses this RNA, but controls its use and thus remains the primary organizer of its own growth and development.

### 3. Case study—Malcolm Potts, “Common Ground on Abortion,” June 5, 2009:

The abortion debate, as President Obama stated at Notre Dame in May, will not go away and should not go away. The way towards common ground is through asking the right questions. As long as one side asserts women's rights and the other the embryos' rights, then the war on abortion will go on consuming our energies and confusing the nation. We need to focus on the real question: Can we actually know when life begins?

I am a physician who has done abortions. I have seen the "heart-wrenching" decisions women make and Obama described in his speech. I also have a PhD in embryology, studying the first few days of development, so for me the question of when life begins is a very real question.

Biology is remarkably prolific. Every egg and sperm is genetically unique. A woman uses only a handful of the 400,000 eggs she produces and a man releases half a billion sperm every time he ejaculates. Some people take fertilization as the beginning of life, but not all fertilized eggs give rise to embryos - some produce an abnormality called a hydatidiform mole, which in rare cases go on to form a life threatening cancer. Molar pregnancies are the result of normal intercourse and each is genetically unique, but they have no ethical or legal status.

The Bible tells us that when men cause an abortion without the woman's permission they should be punished, but it does not suggest abortion is murder (Exodus 21:22). The Holy Koran describes the unfolding complexity of human development in eloquent terms and some Muslim societies permit abortion. Catholic teaching says we don't know when life begins so respect life from fertilization. Many Protestants take implantation, when the egg attaches to uterine wall as the beginning of life. Yet others point out that identical twins can arise as late as 17 to 20 days after fertilization, and suggest that life cannot begin until human individuality has arisen.

I respect these ideas, but as an embryologist I place the beginning of life later in pregnancy. Early embryos are highly abnormal and most of these are aborted spontaneously. Natural abortion is a necessary healing process without which few women would wish to become pregnant. Indeed one of the least controversial reasons for abortion is when the woman knows she is carrying an abnormal embryo. Personally, I see offering an abortion for congenital abnormality as comparable to any other healing procedures doctors perform to step in when nature has failed - as in removing a gangrenous limb. I also know that others will sincerely disagree with me. So how do we find a common ground?

By and large, various faiths and agnostics have developed a consensus on when life support machines can be turned off - when there is incontrovertible evidence that the brain is no longer functioning. I suggest we should

apply the same criterion to the question of when does life begin. I would offer an abortion to a woman who wants it until such time as the brain is functioning. I accept that there are no absolute measures for early brain function, but there is a general consensus it is after 12 weeks.

What I am certain about is that as an embryologist I can no more say when life begins by looking down my microscope than an astronomer can tell if heaven exists by looking through a telescope. Our assertion about when life begins is based on our personal beliefs, just as are assertions about life after death. Each religion and denomination charts a different path to heaven. In the sixteenth century the Europeans fought each other to a standstill over issues of religion relating to life after death. America was the one nation founded on religious tolerance. We need a truce in the wars over life before birth, and to value a diversity of beliefs about the complex question about when life begins. The murder of Dr George Tiller because he did abortions, as he walked into his church in Wichita last Sunday, is an urgent reminder that religious tolerance is the common ground America must honor.

Pott's discussion questions:

- What does Potts claim about the beginning of human life? Where does he assume the unborn aren't human?
- In what ways does he punt to relativism? How neutral is his own position?
- How does Potts confuse scientific questions with philosophical ones? Is he right about religion?
- What does Pott's want pro-lifers to do? Does he want a truce or something else?

The Science of embryology and embryonic stem cell research (ESCR):

1. Definitions:

- (a) Stem cells—fast growing, unspecialized cells that can grow new tissue for the body
- (b) ESCR—destroying human embryos so their stem cells can be harvested
- (c) Cloning—creating an embryo that is the genetic clone of the patient and using that embryo as a source to harvest stem cells. The procedure is known as somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) and is the same whether the embryo is used for therapeutic reasons or reproductive reasons. In short, all cloning is reproductive in that a human embryo is produced. The only question is how we treat the embryo.

2. The moral question of ESCR: What is the embryo?

- (a) If embryos are human, killing them to benefit others is wrong.
- (b) If they are not human, there's no reason to oppose creating them for research.
- (c) From the beginning, the embryos are distinct, living, and whole human organisms.
- (d) Thus, killing them to benefit other humans is wrong.

3. Arguments for ESCR:

- (a) Leftover embryos will die anyway and it's a shame to waste all that usable tissue.
- (b) Pro-life advocates are anti-science.
- (c) ESCR is more promising than adult stem cell research.
- (d) SCNT is not cloning.

4. Response to arguments for ESCR:

- (a) Leftover embryos will die because scientists intend to kill them for research.
- (b) Pro-life advocates are not anti-science, but insist research must be tied to moral principle.
- (c) At the moment, ESCR is not more promising than adult cell treatments.
- (d) SCNT is indeed cloning and anyone who says otherwise is misinformed or lying.

Day 1 Review questions (not an assignment—we will discuss these in class):

1. Define “abortion”
2. What is the pro-life syllogism?
3. What topics do not relate to that syllogism?
4. What topics relate to that syllogism?
5. Describe briefly the shift from moral realism to moral non-realism.
6. What are some responses to the loss of moral meaning?
7. Define relativism and list a few of its flaws.
8. What is begging the question?
9. Give some examples of begging the question in the abortion debate
10. Summarize in a sentence the pro-life argument from science
11. List a few objections to the pro-life argument from science and why they don’t work.
12. What is embryonic stem cell research (ESCR) and why is it morally problematic?
13. How does Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer (SCNT) work?
14. How should you reply to a critic who justifies ESCR this way: “These leftover embryos will die anyway!”