

Making the Case for Life (university talk—long version)

Note: *There is more material here than you will likely use in a 35-45 minute talk. Pacing is key. Practice the material and trim as needed. See the abbreviated outline at the end of this document to get the big picture. The purpose is not word for word memorization, but mastery of the structure and content. This talk originally given at Ohio University in 2014.*

Outline at a glance:

Thesis: we can discover moral clarity on abortion by asking five key questions:

1. What is the nature of moral reasoning?
2. What is the unborn?
3. What is abortion?
4. What makes humans valuable?
5. What are the alternatives?

Presentation Objectives:

- 1) *Clarify the nature of moral reasoning*—As Francis J. Beckwith points out, when pro-life advocates claim that elective abortion unjustly takes the life of a defenseless human being, they are not saying they dislike abortion. They are saying it's objectively wrong, regardless of how one feels about it. Consider the popular bumper sticker: "Don't like abortion? Don't have one!" Notice what's going on here. The pro-life advocate makes a moral claim that he believes is objectively true—namely, that elective abortion is unjust killing. The abortion-choice advocate responds by changing that objective truth claim into one about likes and dislikes, as if the pro-lifer were talking about a mere preference. But this misses the point entirely. Pro-life advocates don't oppose abortion because they find it distasteful; they oppose it because it violates rational moral principles. Imagine if I said, "Don't like spousal abuse? Don't beat your wife!"
- 2) *Clarify the one question that really matters*—So what is the real issue, if not likes and dislikes? 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 one of us? If so, killing him or her to benefit others is a serious moral wrong. Conversely, if the unborn are not human, elective abortion requires no more justification than having a tooth pulled. This is not a debate between those who are pro-choice and those who are anti-choice. Every pro-life advocate that I know is vigorously "pro-choice" when it comes to women choosing a number of moral goods. They support a woman's right to choose her own doctor, her own school, her own husband, and her own career—to name just a few. But some choices are wrong, like intentionally killing innocent human beings simply because they are in the way and cannot defend themselves. We shouldn't be pro-choice about that.
- 3) *Clarify the nature of abortion*—That is, demonstrate both with words and pictures that abortion is the intentional killing of an innocent human being.

- 4) *Clarify the scientific and philosophic case for life*—The science of embryology establishes that from the earliest stages of development, the unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings. True, they have yet to grow and mature, but they are whole human beings nonetheless. Leading embryology textbooks affirm this. Meanwhile, pro-life advocates use philosophy to show there is no morally significant difference between the embryo you once were and the adult you are today that would justify killing you at that earlier stage of development. Differences of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency are not good reasons for saying you had no right to life then but you do now.
- 5) *Clarify the alternatives*—That is, show why the pro-life view does a better job accounting for human equality and human value than rival explanations.

Keys to staying focused

When preparing a pro-life apologetics talk, it's best to keep things clear and simple. Too many pro-lifers say too much, turning their talks into information dumps with no clear thesis or structure. Here are three steps that will give your next talk a razor sharp focus:

Step #1: *Work from a clearly stated syllogism.* In this case:

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

P2: Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being.

P3: Therefore, abortion is wrong.

Step #2: *Filter out all topics that distract from that syllogism.* For example:

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

Step #3: *Emphasize topics that relate directly to that syllogism;* ignore everything else.

- What is the unborn?—He/she is a distinct, living, and whole human being.
- What is abortion?—It's the intentional killing of an innocent human being.
- What makes humans valuable?—We are valuable by nature not function.
- What are the strongest objections to my case and why don't they work?—Judith Jarvis Thomson's bodily rights argument fails to distinguish between withholding support and intentional killing; David Boonin's "desires" argument proves too much and undermines human equality.
- What is the fix if I've acted wrongly on abortion?—The gospel restores broken lives.

I. **Intro:** Joke and Brief Bio

- A. As mentioned in the intro, I'm Judge Chris Donnelly and I served 28 years on the bench in Cook County. I now work with Life Training Institute as a staff apologist.
- B. To be clear, an "apologist" is not someone who walks around saying he's sorry all the time (pause). That's what a husband does! Seriously, an apologist is someone who makes a case for what he or she believes. In short, apologist is one who argues—not by insulting people, but by laying out reasons for a given proposition.
- C. Tonight, I'm going to argue for the truth of the following 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.

I will defend that syllogism using science and philosophy. Briefly, the science of embryology tells us that from the earliest stages of development, the unborn are distinct, living, and whole human beings. You didn't come from an embryo; you once were an embryo. Philosophy tells us there is no essential difference between the embryo you once were and the adult you are today that would justify killing you at that earlier stage of development. Differences of size, level of development, environment (where you are located), and degree of dependency are not good reasons for saying you had no right to life then and could be killed but you do have one today and can't be. Finally, I will review two of the strongest objections to my case—namely, David Boonin's "desires" argument and Judith Jarvis Thomson's bodily rights argument. Then, I want to hear what you have to say. I realize abortion is a contentious issue that impacts some people personally. Please know that my purpose tonight is not to provoke controversy for controversy's sake. Nor do I wish to condemn anyone who's experienced abortion. Rather, I'm just trying to get at the truth the best way I know how by looking at the evidence and drawing conclusions. So here's what I propose: For the next 40 minutes, I'll layout my reasons for thinking the pro-life view is persuasive. After that, I'll open the floor for your questions and hear what you have to say. Fair enough?"

II. **Topic:** "Clarifying the Abortion Debate in a Moral Fog"

- III. **Topic is significant**, because many people think we can't discover truth on the abortion, as if the issue is somehow cut-off from the normal process of weighing evidence and testing arguments according to the rules of principled reasoning. All we have, so the argument goes, are personal perspectives and personal opinions. Abortion, like choosing your favorite flavor of ice cream, is strictly a matter of personal taste and anyone who says otherwise is not to be tolerated. But how does it follow that because people disagree on abortion, nobody is right? People once disagreed on slavery and voting rights for women, but that didn't mean there were no right answers. Instead of engaging the Socratic Quest

for Truth and following the evidence where it leads, a vocal minority wants to thwart discussion altogether.

- A. For example, last year at Oxford University, a free exchange on the abortion issue was shut down because the two presenters were male. Critics insisted the debate be censored because a woman's perspective was not on the agenda. Not only was this a blow to free speech, it was rationally indefensible. To assert that only women can speak on abortion is to commit the ad-hominem fallacy—that is, attacking the person rather than the argument he or she presents.
- B. It also raises a troubling question: *Which* women get to speak? As Christopher Kaczor points out, there is no such thing as a “woman’s perspective” on abortion anymore than there is a male perspective or a brown-eyed persons perspective. Indeed, feminists, let alone women in general, have no single perspective on the issue. This is true even for feminists who support abortion. For example, feminist Naomi Wolf calls abortion “a real death” while feminist Katha Pollitt thinks it no different than vacuuming out your house. In short, while gender perspectives on abortion help us understand personal experience, they are not a substitute for rational inquiry. Rather, it is arguments that must be advanced and defended and those arguments stand or fall on their merits, not the gender of those espousing them (Wolf—“Our bodies our Souls, *New Republic*, October 16, 1995; Pollitt—*Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*, New York: Picador, 2014).

IV. **Thesis:** We can discover moral clarity on abortion by answering five key questions. 1) What is the nature of moral reasoning? 2) What is the unborn? 3) What is abortion? 4) What makes humans valuable? 5) What are the alternatives?

A. What is the nature of moral reasoning?

[Key point: Pro-life advocates don't oppose abortion because we find it *distasteful*, but because it violates objective moral principles—regardless of my personal feelings.]

- 1. Tell me the difference between these two types of claims:
 - (a) “Chocolate ice-cream is better than vanilla.” (It's *subjective*, changes w/tastes)
 - (b) “It's wrong to torture babies for fun.” (It's *objective*, true in spite of my tastes)
- 2. Problem is, many people don't know the difference between those two claims.
 - (a) Example: “I personally oppose abortion, but I won't force my views on others”—Ask, “*Why* are you personally opposed? If abortion doesn't intentionally kill an innocent human being, why be opposed at all? Lincoln made this same point regarding slavery when Stephan Douglas claimed to personally oppose slavery while insisting each state have the right to vote it up

or down. Lincoln replied that if Douglas truly believed slavery was wrong, it made no sense to say it should be left to personal opinion.

- (b) Example: Bumper Sticker—“Don’t like Abortion? Don’t have one!” Notice the key word: “*like*.” That single word entirely changes the kind of claim the pro-lifer makes. That is, it changes the pro-life claim from objective to subjective, reducing the debate to likes or dislikes. Remember! Pro-lifers don’t oppose abortion because they find it distasteful. They oppose it because it intentionally kills an innocent human being. True, the pro-lifer may be wrong about that, but we shouldn’t confuse the type of claim he or she makes. The pro-life claim must be refuted, not merely changed to one we like better. Try this: “Don’t like slavery? Don’t own a slave.” Or, “Don’t like spousal abuse? Don’t beat your wife.” See the problem?
 - (c) Example: Nick Cannon—Remember his song, “Can I Live?” At the last minute, his mother chose not to abort him. Reflecting on that, he wrote a song as if he were speaking to her from the womb. Here’s the line that got Nick in trouble: “Mom, I hope you’ll make the *right* decision and not go through with the knife incision.” Some people were angry—not because Nick was wrong in his description of abortion (no one challenged that), but because he claimed to be right. They said things like “Who are you to judge?” and “You shouldn’t force your personal views on others.”
 - (d) Example: University of Maryland student Greg Dickinson responds to a pro-life display in the school newspaper—“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)
3. What’s happening here is the re-definition of “tolerance.”
- (a) The **Classical view** of tolerance, which I support, goes like this: I think your idea is mistaken, but I will tolerate you expressing your view and making your case. The classical view tolerates persons as being equally valuable, but rejects the claim that all ideas are so. Indeed, the very concept of tolerance presupposes I think you are wrong. Otherwise, I’m not tolerating you. I’m agreeing with you!

- (b) The **New Tolerance** really isn't tolerant: It insists that all ideas are equally valid and if you say differently we won't tolerate you. In short, all ideas are equally valid except those that claim to be true with a capital T. The new tolerance does not seek understanding and dialogue, only censoring of opposing views.
4. The worldview idling behind this new view of tolerance is *relativism*. Relativism is the belief that what's right and wrong is up to us to decide either individually or as a society. There are no objective standards of morality that we are beholden to independent of personal tastes or culture. But relativism is flawed:
- (a) **Relativism is self-defeating**—that is, it can't live with its own rules. Notice the language used by University of Maryland student Greg Dickinson above: He claims morality is personal, but then emphatically states that personal morals *must* be kept personal and freedom of choice *must* be respected. Question: Says who? Is that his view? If so, who is he to push his personal views onto pro-lifers who disagree? Remember: The person who says, "you shouldn't judge" just judged you. The person who claims that you shouldn't force your views on others just forced that view on you.
- (b) **Relativism can't say why anything is truly wrong, including intolerance**—If morals are relative to culture or the individual, there is no ethical difference between Adolph Hitler and Mother Theresa; they just had different preferences: The latter liked to help people while the former liked to kill them. Who are we to judge? But such a view is counterintuitive. We know there's a difference between starving a child and feeding him. Greg Koukl writes: "Relativists find themselves in the unenviable position of having to admit that there is no such thing as evil, justice, fairness, and no obligation of tolerance."
- (c) **Relativists inevitably make moral judgments**—If the relativist thinks it's wrong to judge, how can he say that pro-lifers are mistaken in the first place? Isn't he just pushing his socially conditioned view on me? Whenever a relativist says you shouldn't force your views on others, the first words out of your mouth should be "Why not?" Any answer given will be an example of him forcing his views on you.
5. It also won't do to dismiss my case as religious. As philosophy professor Francis Beckwith points out, arguments are valid or invalid, sound or unsound. Calling an argument "religious" is a category mistake like asking, "How tall is the number five?" Put simply, the pro-life case must be answered, not dismissed with a label.
6. To review, when pro-life advocates claim abortion is wrong, they are not making a subjective claim about likes and dislikes. They are making an objective claim about right and wrong. True, they may be mistaken about their claim that elective abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being, but it's not enough to simply dismiss it on grounds of personal taste. Rather it must be shown that the argument presented was poorly reasoned or unsound.

B. What is the unborn?

[Key point: The abortion issue is not morally complex, but comes down to one question that trumps all others.]

1. Greg Koukl: “Daddy, can I kill this?” That depends. What is it?
2. When it comes to abortion, the question “what is it?” is crucial and many ignore it.
 - (a) Example: Feminist Katha Pollitt—In her new book *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*, she writes that abortion “is a good thing for society” because it’s “good for everyone” if women only have the children they want (p. 38). Question: Are the unborn part of that society? And does “everyone” include the unborn? Notice that with that particular statement, she simply *assumes* the unborn are not members of the human family.
 - (b) Example: President Obama—On the 2014 anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that mandated abortion-on-demand, the President affirmed the decision “because this is a country where everyone deserves the freedom and opportunity to fulfill their dreams.” Question: Mr. President, does “everyone” include the unborn? Notice that like Pollitt, he simply assumes the unborn are not human; he doesn’t argue for it.
3. To be clear, the issue that separates me from President Obama and Katha Pollitt is not that they’re pro-choice and I’m anti-choice. Indeed, we’re all anti-choice on lots of things like discrimination against minorities, dumping toxins in our nation’s rivers, and denying fundamental rights to oppressed people. What separates me from them is the fundamental question, What is the unborn? To see this, ask yourself this question: Would Ms. Pollitt or President Obama argue that killing two-year olds is good for society because it’s good for “everyone” to have only the children they want? Never in a million years! They only reason they make such a claim about the unborn is because they assume the unborn are not one of us. But merely assuming the unborn are not human won’t do. They need to argue for it.
4. I’m vigorously “pro-choice” on women choosing their own worldviews, healthcare providers, schools, men they wish to marry, careers they wish to pursue, etc. But I think we all agree that some choices are wrong, like intentionally killing innocent human beings simply because they are in the way of something we want. So, again, the issue before us is not “choice and who decides,” but, “What is the unborn? That is, are they members of the human family?”
5. So, what is the unborn? The science of embryology points to a clear, non-arbitrary divide between sperm/egg on one hand, and a newly conceived human embryo on the other. That is to say, from the earliest stages of development, embryos are distinct human beings. True, they have yet to grow and mature, but they are human nonetheless.

6. Leading embryology textbooks affirm this. For example, in “The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology” (Saunders/Elsevier, 2008), Keith L. Moore & T.V.N. Persaud write: “A zygote is the beginning of a new human being. Human development begins at fertilization, the process during which a male gamete or sperm...unites with a female gamete or oocyte...to form a single cell called a zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marks the beginning of each of us as a unique individual.” T.W. Sadler’s “Langman’s Embryology” (Saunders, 1993) states: “The development of a human begins with fertilization, a process by which the spermatozoon from the male and the oocyte from the female unite to give rise to a new organism, the zygote.” Embryologists Ronan O’Rahilly and Fabiola Müller write, “Although life is a continuous process, fertilization is a critical landmark because, under ordinary circumstances, a new, genetically distinct human organism is thereby formed” (Human Embryology & Teratology. 2nd edition. New York: Wiley-Liss, 1996).
7. Leading abortion-choice advocates confirm this as well. For example, in his book *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge, 1993) Peter Singer—a bioethicist at Princeton University and supporter of both abortion and infanticide—denies the claim that the beginning of human life can’t be known. He writes: “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.” Philosopher David Boonin, author of *A Defense of Abortion* (Cambridge, 2002), writes: “A human fetus, after all, is simply a human being at a very early stage in his or her development.” Moreover, embryonic stem cell researchers know exactly what kind of being they are dealing with when they extract stem cells from living human embryos. The researchers want human cells from living human embryos for human cures—and they’re certain that’s exactly what they’re getting.
8. Objections:
 - (a) *Ignorance*—“We don’t know if the unborn are human.” If it’s true we don’t know if the embryo is human, that’s an excellent reason not to kill it since we may be taking a human life. As former President Ronald Reagan once observed, if you are out hunting and you see bushes rustling in front of you and you’re not sure if that’s the deer you’ve been after or your best friend, are you going to open fire? Not unless you’re Dick Cheney!
 - (b) *Twinning*— “An early embryo may split into two organisms. Thus, we can’t say that from fertilization forward, it’s a whole human being.” First, how does it follow that because an entity may split that it wasn’t a whole living entity prior to the split? As Patrick Lee points out, if you cut a flatworm in half, you get two flatworms! Does it follow there was no flatworm prior to the split? Second, if an early embryo does not have a right to life because a twin can be formed from it, and a twin can be formed from any of us through cloning, then none of us has

a right to life. Third, if the early embryo prior to twinning is merely a hunk of cells and not a unitary organism, why doesn't each cell develop individually into a new living entity? Instead, just the opposite is true. Robert George writes, "These allegedly independent, non-communicating cells regularly function together to develop into a single, more mature member of the human species." This fact shows that the cells are interacting from the very beginning, "restraining them from individually developing as whole organisms" (Robert George, "Embryo Ethics," *Daedalus*, Winter 2008).

- (c) *Miscarriages*—Some critics point to the high number of miscarriages as proof the early embryo is not a unitary being. But how does it follow that because nature *spontaneously* aborts high numbers of embryos that a) they are not living human beings or b) I may *deliberately* kill them through abortion or embryonic stem cell research? Many third-world countries have high infant mortality rates. Are we to conclude that those infants who die sooner rather than later were never whole human beings? Admittedly, these miscarriages are tragic. But as liberal journalist Andrew Sullivan points out, just because natural disasters happen does not mean mass murder is justified (Andrew Sullivan, "Only Human," *The New Republic*, July 19, 2001).
- (d) *Molar pregnancies*—Dr. Malcom Potts, former medical director for Planned Parenthood, claims that not all acts of fertilization result in a human organism, that hydatidiform moles can form from early conceptions. Here he confuses necessary and sufficient conditions. I'm not claiming that everything that results from a sperm-egg union is human, only that every human conceived through natural reproduction begins that way. Regarding hydatidiform moles in particular, they do not result from normal, biologically complete conceptions; rather, they arise from flawed or deficient fertilizations. As Dr. Maureen Condic points out, "despite an initial (superficial) similarity to embryos, hydatidiform moles do not start out as embryos and later transform into tumors." Rather, "they are intrinsically tumors from their initiation. Thus, they have no intrinsically directed capacity to develop into a human being. For example, the "Alphabet Song" and "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" both sound alike in the first five measures, but they are different songs from the beginning. One does not morph into the other. (Maureen Condic, "A Biological Definition of the Human Embryo," in Stephen Napier, ed., *Persons, Moral Worth, and Embryos: A Critical Analysis of Pro-Choice Arguments*, New York: Springer, 2011, p. 226)
- (e) *Embryo doesn't look human*—Sadly, we have a long history of defining people out of existence who don't look like us. The question is *not* what an entity looks like, but what it is. John Merrick (Elephant Man) didn't look human but undoubtedly was while mannequins may look human but aren't remotely so. Put simply, our intuitions can be mistaken. We must examine them in light of reason. A little over a century ago, many Whites thought it unthinkable that anyone would consider Blacks human beings. Consider this example from *The*

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, where Huck contrives a story to explain to Aunt Sally his late arrival by boat:

“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.”

Notice it’s simply assumed the black man is not one of 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. They cast him as the missing link and the display drew huge crowds. (Robert Moor, “Pygmy Caged in Monkey House,” *New York Magazine*, April 21, 2012)

Admittedly, an early embryo doesn’t look like an adult, but it does look exactly as a developing human should look like at that stage of development. Philosopher Richard Stith suggests a thought experiment for rethinking our intuitions about the early embryo. Imagine you are on a South American safari in pre-digital days and you’ve got a Polaroid Camera. For those of you under 50, a Polaroid Camera was an awkward looking device that, once you shot a picture, would spit it out allowing you to watch it develop before your eyes—usually in about 90 seconds. At just the right moment, you captured a picture of a Black Jaguar leaping across the trail in front of you. Black Jags are almost never photographed, but you got it! While you are waiting for the picture to emerge, I rip the camera from your hands and tear up the emerging picture. Will you be angry? Suppose I replied, “That’s not a picture. It’s just a brown smudge on a piece of paper!” Will that satisfy you? Never! You’d rightly point out, “The picture of the jaguar was already there. We just couldn’t see it yet!” Likewise, you were already there from the beginning. We just couldn’t see you.

C. What is abortion?

[Key point: Abortion is the *intentional* killing of an innocent human being.]

1. *Abortion is best defined as “the intentional killing of a human fetus.”* This definition does not unfairly stack the deck toward the pro-life side and is accepted by many abortion-choice advocates. For example:
 - (a) In his book *Life’s Dominion*, Ronald Dworkin writes, “Abortion deliberately kills a developing embryo and is a choice for death.”
 - (b) Former Planned Parenthood President Faye Wattleton is even more direct. “Any pretense that abortion is not killing is a signal of our ambivalence, a signal that we cannot say yes, it kills a fetus” (Faye Wattleton, “Speaking Frankly,” *Ms.*, May / June 1997, Volume VII, Number 6, 67).

- (c) Dr. Warren Hern, author of *Abortion Practice*—the medical text that teaches abortion procedures—told a Planned Parenthood conference: “We have reached a point in this particular technology [D&E abortion] where there is no possibility of denying an act of destruction. It is before one’s eyes. The sensations of dismemberment flow through the current like an electric current.” (Warren Hern & Billie Corrigan, “What About Us? Staff Reactions to D&E,” paper to the Association of Planned Parenthood Physicians, Sand Diego 1978).
2. To illustrate what Dworkin, Wattleton, and Hern are saying, I’ve brought a short 55-second clip depicting abortion. Please feel free to avert your gaze during the 55 seconds if you wish not to watch. Again, I’m not showing this clip to condemn anyone, but to clarify what’s at stake. Admittedly, the pictures are shocking. The question, however, is not are abortion pictures shocking. They are. The real question is, Are the pictures true? If so, they ought to be admitted as evidence. We ought to avoid empty appeals to emotion, those offered in place of good reasons. If, however, the pictures substantiate the reasons I am offering and do not obscure them, they serve a vital purpose. Truth is the issue. This is precisely the point feminist (and abortion-choice advocate) Naomi Wolf makes in a *New Republic* article:
- “The pro-choice movement often treats with contempt the pro-lifers’ practice of holding up to our faces their disturbing graphics....[But] how can we charge that it is vile and repulsive for pro-lifers to brandish vile and repulsive images if the images are real? To insist that truth is in poor taste is the very height of hypocrisy. Besides, if these images are often the facts of the matter, and if we then claim that it is offensive for pro-choice women to be confronted with them, then we are making the judgment that women are too inherently weak to face a truth about which they have to make a grave decision. This view is unworthy of feminism” (*New Republic*, October 16, 1995).
3. One more thing—I mentioned earlier that I am not here to condemn anyone. Here’s why: Though my topic tonight is not Christianity and I won’t be making a sectarian case for my views, I do believe the Christian gospel is true and reasonable to believe. That gospel puts all of us in this room on the same footing before the bar of God’s justice. That gospel tells of a good and holy God who created humans to worship and enjoy him forever. But we rebelled against our Creator, set ourselves up as God, and God who had every right to destroy the race for its rebellion against Him, did something remarkable. He sent Jesus, the sinless One to bear in full His righteous judgment against our sin. You know what I call that? Very good news. If you want to hear more about that good news, I will gladly chat with you after the talk either personally or via email.
4. Roll clip—Download it here: <https://vimeo.com/37025422>.
5. Emmett Till Story explains need for disturbing visuals

D. What makes humans valuable?

[Key point: Humans are equal by nature not function.]

1. Science tells us the unborn are human but science cannot tell us how to treat them anymore than it can tell us how to treat teenagers or adults.
2. Key philosophical question: If you agree with the science of embryology that the unborn are indeed human, does each and every human being have an equal right to life or do only some have it in virtue of some characteristic which may come and go within the course of their lifetimes?
3. Carl Sagan, for example, denies human equality. For him having neurological development capable of supporting adult-like brain wave activity bestows value and a right to life. As a result, the unborn lacks what he calls “characteristically human thinking.” But what are we left with? If brain development bestows value, shouldn’t those with more of it have a greater right to life than those with less—born or unborn? After all, development does not end at birth. Moreover, Sagan presents no argument as to why adult brain waves patterns bestow value—he merely asserts that this is so. Indeed, later in that same passage, he concedes that his standard is arbitrary! Most troubling, his assertion proves too much. Newborns lack adult brain wave patterns which means they are disqualified along with human fetuses.
4. As to what Sagan means by “characteristically human thinking,” I can only guess. He could mean that consciousness bestows value and a right to life. But, again, why is that value-giving? It sounds ad-hoc to me. And what do we mean by consciousness? That is, do we mean one must be able to immediately exercise it or do we mean something else?
5. As Christopher Kaczor points out, requiring actual consciousness renders us non-persons whenever we sleep. Requiring immediately exercisable consciousness excludes those in surgery. Requiring the basic neural brain structures for consciousness (but not consciousness itself) excludes those whose brains are temporarily damaged. On the other hand, if having a particular nature from which the capacity for consciousness is present makes one a valuable human being—even if one can’t currently exercise that capacity—then those sleeping, in surgery, or temporarily comatose are valuable, but so also would be the normal human embryo, fetus, and newborn. (Kaczor, *Ethics of Abortion*, p. 53)
6. Meanwhile, pro-life advocates contend there is no morally significant difference between the embryo you once were and the adult you are today that would justify killing you at that earlier stage of development. Differences of size, level of development, environment, and degree of dependency are not good reasons for saying you had no right to life then but you do now. Stephen Schwarz suggests the acronym SLED as a helpful reminder of these non-essential differences:

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

Level of Development: True, you were less developed as an embryo, but why is that decisive? Six-month olds are less developed than teenagers both physically and mentally, but we don't think the former have less of a right to life.

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

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

7. In short, humans are equal by nature not function. Although they differ immensely in their respective degrees of development, they are nonetheless equal because they share a common human nature—and they had that human nature from the moment they began to exist. If I am wrong about that, human equality is a fiction.
8. Abraham Lincoln made a similar point about slavery when he argued that arguments used to disqualify the slave worked equally well to disqualify whites:

You say 'A' is white and 'B' is black. It is color, then: the lighter having the right to enslave the darker? Take care. By this rule, you are a slave to the first man you meet with a fairer skin than your own.

You do not mean color exactly—You mean the whites are intellectually the superiors of the blacks, and therefore have the right to enslave them? Take care again: By this rule you are to be a slave to the first man you meet with an intellect superior to your own.

But you say it is a question of interest, and, if you can make it your interest, you have the right to enslave another. Very well. And if he can make it his interest, he has the right to enslave you.¹

9. Think, for a moment, about your 10 closest friends. Would you agree that each of them has the same basic rights and that each should be treated equally? But if all of them should be treated equally, there must be some quality they all have equally that justifies that equal treatment. What is that characteristic? As my colleague Steve Wagner notes, “it can't be that all of us look human, because some have been disfigured. It can't be that all of us have functional brains, because some are in reversible comas. It can't be one's ability to think or feel pain, for some think better than others and some don't feel any pain. It can't be something we can gain or lose, or something of which we can have more or less. If something like that grounds

¹ *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (Rutgers University Press, 1953) vol. II, p. 222.

rights, equal rights don't exist. And if we look at the whole population of America, almost 300 million people, there is only one quality we all have equally—we're all human."

E. What are the alternatives?

1. I'll close by briefly covering two of the strongest objections to my case. Of course, there are other objections, but I picked the two toughest in hopes of being fair with my critics.
 - (a) *David Boonin's "desires" argument*—Boonin argues that you and I are identical to the embryos we once were. He agrees with pro-life advocates that you are identical to the embryo you once were. That is, you were the same being then as you are today. However, just because you are identical to the embryo you once were, it doesn't follow that you have the same right to life then as you do now. In short, it's not being a human being which bestows value, but having desires which are immediately exercisable—which doesn't happen for the fetus until weeks 28-32. Until that point, abortion is not morally impermissible. While I appreciate Boonin's intellectual honesty in affirming that you are identical to your former embryonic self, I find his thesis deeply problematic. First, why is having "desires" value-giving in the first place? Boonin doesn't say. Second, Boonin's argument proves too much. It disqualifies newborns. As Christopher Kaczor points out, to "desire" anything requires belief and judgment—which newborns aren't capable of exercising until several weeks (or months) after birth! Third, if "desires" bestow a right to life, human equality is undermined. After all, people vary in their desires to go on living. Fourth, Stoics and Buddhists may not "desire" anything—do they forfeit their right to life? Or, to borrow from Kaczor, suppose I accidentally shoot myself in the head with a staple gun—damaging the part of my brain that controls desire. Imagine further that I survive, but now I no longer desire anything. Do I stop being a person with a right to life? Finally, to cite an example from Francis J. Beckwith, suppose a doctor surgically alters the brain of a developing fetus so it never desires anything. Five years later, the child is killed so his organs can be harvested to treat disease in others. Given he didn't desire anything when he was killed, was he harmed? Now, suppose Boonin replies that five-year olds are the kind of beings that shouldn't be treated that way. I agree. But notice what's doing the moral work here—it's not the child's immediately exercisable "desires" (he has none), but his human nature that dictates we ought to treat him a certain way.
 - (b) *Judith Jarvis Thomson's bodily rights argument*—Thomson argues that even if the unborn is human, innocent, and has a right to life, he does not have the right to use the mother's body to sustain his own life against her will. She may withhold support if she chooses. Abortion, for Thomson, is the justified withholding of support. In addition to her famous violinist analogy where she

likens unwanted pregnancy to being forcibly hooked up to a musician that needs your kidney to survive, she describes the fetus as an intruder, though an innocent one. The mother may justly remove the intruder if she wants to withhold supporting him.

Of course, for Thomson's argument to work, the relationship between the mother and the intruder must parallel the mother's relationship to her own child. Right away there are problems. First, there can be no intruder until two parents create him. Second, abortion is much more than withholding support—it's actively killing another human through dismemberment or poisoning. Indeed, per Thomson, I not only have the right to remove an innocent intruder from my yard; I can cut him up and throw his body parts in the garbage! As abortion-choice advocate and philosopher Mary Anne Warren points out, "mere ownership does not give me the right to kill innocent people whom I find on my property."

Nor is pregnancy parallel to being forcibly hooked up to a violinist. In Thomson's analogy, the violinist has an underlying pathology and needs your kidney to survive. If you unplug him, he eventually dies from his illness, not because you actively killed him. You might even argue that although his death was foreseen, you did not intend it by withholding your support. Indeed, as Kaczor points out, a general in a just war may foresee that some of his troops will be killed in battle, but he does not intend their deaths. Conversely, with elective abortion, the death of the unborn human is not only foreseen; it's intended. He dies not from an underlying pathology, but from an intentional act of dismemberment. Moreover, other than the case of rape, waking up and finding yourself forcibly hooked up to a violinist is not like pregnancy where both father and mother voluntarily engaged in an act biologically ordered to the creation of offspring.

Kaczor adds a point I hadn't considered, namely, that Thomson is inconsistent. That is, while it's true that you did not choose to be hooked up to the violinist, it's equally true that he didn't choose to be hooked up to you. If you may unplug yourself by directly killing him, then he should be free to unplug by directly killing you. True, the fetus lacks the power to detach, but the question here is not power but the moral right to detach at the cost of the mother's life. Suppose the fetus had an agent to help him do this the same way a mother has an agent to perform the abortion. Is the fetus morally justified detaching even though it kills his mother? In short, if the violinist may not unplug himself causing your death, then you should not unplug and cause his. I guess you could say the sword cuts both ways.

2. I appreciate you considering my case. At the end of the day, the abortion controversy is not about gender politics, but a deeper and more profound question: *Who counts as one of us?* That is, does each and every human being have an equal right to life or do only **some** have it in virtue of some characteristic that none of us

share equally? All of us are more or less rational, more or less self-conscious, and more or less sentient. But we are equally human because we share the same human nature, and we had that nature from the moment we began to exist. I look forward to hearing your thoughts in the Q&A.

Abbreviated Outline:

- I. **Intro**—Apologist Joke and Bio
 - A. Define “apologist”
 - B. Present pro-life syllogism
 - C. Present overview of how you will defend it:
 1. with facts and arguments rooted in science and philosophy, not personal perspective
 2. with openness to hear their questions
- II. **Topic**: “Clarifying the abortion debate in a moral fog”
- III. **Significant**, because many think moral truth on abortion can’t be known, that all we have are personal perspectives:
 - A. Debate canceled at Oxford
 - B. Which woman’s perspective counts?
- IV. **Thesis**: We can discover moral clarity on abortion by answering 5 key questions.
 - A. What is the nature of moral reasoning?
 1. It’s objective not subjective (claims about ice cream versus claims about truth)
 2. Problem is, many don’t know the difference between the two. For example:
 - (a) Claim: “Personally opposed”—ask, “Why are you personally opposed?”
 - (b) Bumper sticker: “Don’t *like* abortion?” confuses type of claim pro-lifer makes
 - (c) Nick Cannon got people angry when he claimed to be right in his song
 - (d) University of Maryland student Greg Dickinson says we must never impose moral rules but then imposes a few of his own
 3. Redefinition of “tolerance”
 - (a) Classical view of tolerance tolerates people, but rejects all ideas as equally valid
 - (b) New tolerance says all ideas are equally valid and you won’t be tolerated if you disagree.

4. Relativism—the belief that right and wrong are up to us—is the worldview behind the new tolerance. But relativism is flawed:
 - (a) Relativism is self-refuting—Example: Greg Dickinson quote
 - (b) Relativism can't say why anything is wrong, including intolerance.
 - (c) Relativists inevitably make moral judgments—that is, they don't tolerate non-relativists.
5. Won't work to dismiss the pro-life case as “religious”—arguments are true or false, valid or invalid. Calling an argument “religious” is a category mistake.
6. To review, when pro-lifers say abortion is wrong, they are making an objective claim about right and wrong, not a subjective one about personal tastes.

B. What is the unborn?

1. Koukl—“Daddy can I kill this?” (That depends: What is it?)
2. Many ignore the question, What is the unborn?
 - (a) Example: Katha Pollitt quote—Are the unborn part of ‘society?’
 - (b) Example: President Obama quote—Does “everyone” include the unborn?
3. The issue that separates Pollitt/Obama from me is not who is pro-choice and who is not. Rather, it's, What is the unborn?
4. I'm vigorously pro-choice on many things, but not intentionally killing innocent human beings.
5. What is the unborn? Science of embryology says the unborn are distinct, living, whole human beings.
6. Leading embryology text books affirm this (quote them)
7. Leading abortion advocates affirm this (quote them)
8. Objections:
 - (a) Ignorance
 - (b) Twinning
 - (c) Miscarriages
 - (d) Molar pregnancies
 - (e) Appearance

C. What is abortion?

1. Abortion is the intentional killing of a human fetus—critics concede this:
 - (a) Ronald Drowkin quote
 - (b) Faye Wattleton quote
 - (c) Warren Hern quote
2. Abortion video clip—Issue is not are the pictures emotional, but are they true (Naomi Wolf quote).
3. Purpose: not to condemn (gospel)
4. Roll clip

D. What makes humans valuable?

1. Science tells us the unborn are human but can't tell us how to treat them.
2. Key philosophical question—Does each and every human being have an equal right to life?
3. Carl Sagan denies unborn are valuable human beings but in so doing he undermines human equality.
4. Pro-life advocates contend there is no essential difference between unborn and born (SLED)—humans are valuable by nature not function.
5. Ask, What makes us equal? Can't be something that we don't share equally and that may come and go in the course of our lifetimes.

E. What are the alternatives?

1. David Boonin's "desires" argument proves too much, undermines human equality, and is counterintuitive.
2. Judith Jarvis Thomson's bodily rights argument fails to distinguish between withholding support and intentional killing.
3. At the end of the day, abortion debate is not about a surgical procedure, but who counts as one of us?

[Q&A]