

Why Pro-Life? The Case for Inclusion

Abortion ends the life of a human embryo or fetus. Is this killing morally permissible? Or is it an injustice?

More than 150 years ago, a Boston physician named Horatio R. Storer pointed to the heart of the issue. “The whole question,” he observed, “turns on ... the real nature of the foetus *in utero*.”

Does the unborn child have a right not to be intentionally killed? Does she matter like we matter? Does she count as one of us?

Yes, she does. This position is based on a *fact of science* and a *principle of justice*.

Science: The unborn is a human being

First, the unborn (the human zygote, embryo, or fetus) is a human being—a living human organism at the earliest developmental stages. This is a fact established by the science of embryology. Four features of the unborn human are important:

Distinct. The unborn has a DNA and body distinct from her mother and father. She develops her own arms, legs, brain, nervous system, heart, and so forth.

Living. The unborn meets the biological criteria for life. She grows by reproducing cells. She turns nutrients into energy through metabolism. And she can respond to stimuli.

Human. The unborn has a human genetic signature. She is also the offspring of human parents, and humans can only beget other humans.

Organism. The unborn is an organism (rather than a mere organ or tissue)—an individual whose parts work together for the good of the whole. Guided by a complete genetic code, she needs only the proper environment and nutrition to develop herself through the different stages of life as a member of our species.

“Human development begins at fertilization when a sperm fuses with an oocyte to form a single cell, a zygote,” explains the textbook *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology*. “This highly specialized, totipotent cell marks the beginning of each of us as a unique individual.”

The scientific evidence, then, shows that the unborn is a living individual of the species *Homo sapiens*, the same *kind* of being as us, only at an earlier stage of development. Each of us was once a zygote, embryo, and fetus, just as we were once infants, toddlers, and adolescents.

Justice: All human beings have human rights

Second, all human beings have human rights. Everyone counts. This is a principle of justice.

Unborn humans are different from most born humans in a number of ways, but those differences aren't relevant to whether or not someone has rights. Unborn children may look different from older human beings, but appearance has nothing to do with value. Unborn children are less physically and mentally developed, but toddlers are less developed than teenagers, and that doesn't make them any less important. Unborn children are dependent on someone else, but so are newborn children and many people with disabilities.

Defenders of abortion often argue that unborn humans aren't “persons” who have rights because they lack certain characteristics. One problem with this view is that it excludes more human beings than just unborn children. If unborn children aren't persons because they lack higher mental functions, for example, then human infants, people in temporary comas, and patients with advanced dementia aren't persons either.

Another problem is that this approach undermines equality for everyone. If characteristics like cognitive ability or physical independence make us valuable, then those who have more of those characteristics are more valuable than those who have less. *None of us* are equal according to this view.

Historically, every single attempt to divide humanity into those who have rights and those who are expendable has proven to be a colossal mistake. Why think abortion is any different?

The truth is that we have human rights simply because we are human—not because of what we look like, or what we can do, or what others think or feel about us, but rather because of what

(the kind of being) we are. That's why every human being matters, and every human being matters equally.

Why abortion is unjust

The argument for the pro-life view, then, may be summarized like this:

1. The unborn is a human being.
2. All human beings have human rights, which include the right not to be intentionally killed.
3. Therefore, the unborn human being has human rights.

This is why abortion—the intentional killing of human beings *in utero* (through lethal suction, dismemberment, crushing, or poisoning)—is unjust. It's why both pregnant women and their unborn children deserve our respect, protection, and care.

Turn over for responses to arguments in favor of abortion —>



unborn child at 4 months

Here are some of the most common arguments offered in defense of abortion—and why they don't work.

Choice

Many abortion supporters say that women have a right to choose, or that we should trust women and let them decide. People do have the right to choose to do lots of things. But there are some acts that aren't just and shouldn't be permitted by law because they harm innocent people. The question at hand is whether abortion is one of those harmful acts. There are good reasons (*see other side*) to think it is.

Bodily autonomy

Women have a right to control their own bodies, many defenders of abortion argue. Bodily autonomy is very important, but it must respect the bodies and rights of others. Most people agree, for example, that pregnant women shouldn't ingest drugs that cause birth defects. And if *harming* unborn children is wrong, then *dismembering* and *killing* them (through abortion) is even worse. Moreover, parents should provide basic care for their children (including during pregnancy) because they are responsible for the existence of those children.

Tough circumstances

Pregnant women often face very difficult circumstances. But if unborn children are valuable human beings, like born children, then killing them is no more justified in tough situations (e.g., financial hardship) than killing born children in those same situations. Our response to the difficulties women face should be to provide support, resources, and ethical alternatives—so no woman feels like abortion is her only option.

Rape

Although rape and incest account for less than one percent of Minnesota abortions, these cases are very real. Rape is a truly horrific crime, and the crime is made even worse when the woman then becomes a pregnant mother against her will. Abortion, however, compounds the violence of rape by taking the life of a vulnerable human being who has done nothing wrong. Both the mother and child deserve support and care in the midst of this very painful and unfair situation.

Adverse diagnoses

An adverse prenatal diagnosis is heartbreaking. But just as disease and disability don't justify killing born children, they aren't good reasons to kill unborn children either. Moreover, support and alternatives to abortion are available, including

perinatal hospice in the event of a terminal diagnosis.

Saving the mother

In rare and tragic cases, saving a pregnant woman's life requires ending her pregnancy (such as through C-section)—even though the child may not be able to survive outside the womb. This is uncontroversial, though, because it's better to save the mother's life than to let both mother and child die. It is not the same as intentionally killing the child, which is never necessary.

Imposing a view

Some people express personal opposition to abortion, yet don't want to impose that view on others by making abortion illegal. But the reason to personally oppose abortion is that it unjustly takes the life of an innocent human being. And surely the law ought to protect basic human rights and prevent violence against the defenseless. No one would say, "I'm personally opposed to sex trafficking, but I don't want to impose that view on everyone else."

Danger of illegal abortion

Before abortion was legalized, some say, many women died from illegal abortions—and this will happen again when abortion is banned. The truth is that antibiotics and other medical advances produced a dramatic decline in maternal deaths through the middle of the 20th century. This drop occurred *before* the 1973 nationwide legalization of

abortion, which had no apparent effect on mortality rates. Indeed, a wealth of evidence shows that we can protect the rights of unborn children and have a high standard of maternal health at the same time.

Men and abortion

Some people say that men shouldn't express an opinion about abortion. It's true that men can't fully understand the experience of pregnancy, but it's also true that abortion is either right or wrong irrespective of the experience of any particular person. The pro-life view is held by millions of women. That view cannot just be dismissed because of a trait of a person who happens to be advocating it. If abortion really is the unjust taking of innocent human life, then both women and men ought to speak up on behalf of the unborn girls and boys who have no voice.

Find additional information online at mccl.org/whyprolife. Information about pregnancy help and post-abortion support can be found at mccl.org/pregnant.

What Is Abortion?

(most common methods)

Suction (1st trimester): Powerful vacuum suctions the unborn human out of the uterus in pieces

Dilation and evacuation (2nd trimester): Grasping instruments tear the unborn human apart and remove her body piece by piece

Chemical abortion or RU486 (1st trimester): First drug blocks pregnancy hormone, killing the child; second drug induces contractions to expel her