

Babytalk

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When was the last time it happened? Perhaps you were eating lunch with a friend at work, returning home from a movie, or discussing the ways of the world with a next-door neighbor when a sudden chill entered the conversation.

Abortion. The word had been spoken.

And the realization hit - your partner in conversation was not pro-life. What may have been a pleasant talk suddenly became strained as the supporter of legal abortion hit you with the hard questions - rape, incest, youngmothers, fetal deformities - the list is not long, but your answers didn't seem to be either. You had a tough time putting together a response that makes sense to *you*, much less to your new opponent. Why is this so difficult? How *do* you answer those questions?

It is difficult because the pro-abortion camps tend to carry hidden assumptions into the conversation - assumptions which the pro-life person often unwittingly accepts. Let's examine a few of the questions and see if we can discover what hidden assumption is contained within each.

1) I don't personally agree with abortion but I don't have the right to force my morals on others - I don't want to step on any toes.

This statement is not restricted to pro-aborts - it is often made by people who claim to be pro-life. They aren't. The problem can be illustrated very readily in the following conversation:

"Let's say your neighbor brought home her newborn from the hospital this morning, and this afternoon you saw her in the back yard crushing the child's skull with a rock. Would you force your morals on her by calling the police?"

"That's different - that's against the law."

"The law is the morality of society. We pass laws against what we don't like (prostitution, drug use, etc.) and in favor of what we do like. She obviously doesn't agree with the law's morality. Yet the whole point of the law is to force some people to do things they don't want to do, or stop them from doing things they do want to do. You can avoid forcing your morals on her, but only by not dialing 911. Now, what is she doing to you? By her very action she is forcing her morals on you. She is killing someone, which violates your moral law and the moral law of society. She is forcing you to quietly accept her morality. She makes you feel guilty about interfering with her free decision to kill. Does she have the right to force her morals on you?"

2) You don't have the right to force your opinions on others

This variant is generally used by the pro-abortion. Those who make this statement fail to consider that the statement is, itself, an opinion. Open the discussion gently:

"Do you *really* believe that *no one* has the right to force their own value system on someone else?"

"Yes, I do."

"And you think that I clearly don't accept that idea?"

"Of course not - if you did, you wouldn't be trying to make me live my life according to your value system."

The set-up is complete.

"So, you want to force your values, values which I clearly don't subscribe to, onto me? You want to force me to accept the idea that no one should be forced to accept other people's ideas? If you *really* believe what you say, then you should remain silent when I assert pro-life views, in order to avoid forcing your values onto me."

3) Would you force a 14 year-old girl to complete a pregnancy? How about an incest victim? A rape victim?

These statements are all variations on a theme - they assume that getting rid of the effect of an act will somehow make the act less heinous. This is a veiled form of subjectivism - it assumes that actions are not wrong in and of themselves, they are only wrong if unwanted consequences follow.

Legal abortion makes it easier for men to commit incest and/or have sex with girls. In nearly every state in the Union, a 14 year-old who has sex has been statutorily raped. Indeed, the abortion laws of at least two states assert that intercourse with a person less than 16 years old which later results in an abortion must be considered a felony.

We know from a 1995 Alan Guttmacher study (a research arm of Planned Parenthood) that the younger the girl having sex, the older her partner is likely to be - 12, 13, and 14 year-old girls are being impregnated by 20, 21, 25 year-old men. We know that 50% of all pregnant girls under the age of 15 abort. We know that the majority of pregnant teenage girls are victims of sexual abuse. (Champaign News-Gazette,

9/5/1995, p. C-7, "For Teen Moms, trouble starts with sex abuse). Medical personnel are required to report signs of sexual abuse. Why aren't abortionists reporting the abuse and statutory rapes of these young girls?

A case in point: in Boynton Beach, Florida, 1968, a man impregnated his daughter. Because abortion was illegal, this retired plumber took the child his daughter bore and buried her alive in the back yard. He moved to Scottsdale, PA, impregnated her again, and buried this baby in the basement. Police were alerted to the crime in 1995, and were able to dig up and identify the bodies, successfully charging the man with rape and murder (Champaign News-Gazette, p. A-6, 4/19/1995, "Police Seek Body of Baby that Man had by Daughter").

In 1970, that man had to bury the children alive. Today, he would simply take his daughter to an abortion clinic and tell the clinic workers (assuming they ask) that the girl was impregnated by her boyfriend. The abortionist wouldn't report it - after all, a fair number of young women come in to be cleaned out. The evidence of the crime is carried out with the rest of the bodies in the morning trash.

Does this happen often? No one knows. Abortion clinics cannot be required to show any data on their patients to anyone. However, Meta Uchtman, director of the Indiana chapter of Suicide Anonymous, says that 80% of the young women who call her hot line have had an abortion. A standard question for women who show signs of clinical depression is "Have you had an abortion?"

When you see a pregnant 14 year-old, look around for the man who is exploiting her. Legal abortion is one of the tools in his arsenal. Abortion doesn't help the girl - her risk for suicide after an abortion is nine times higher - it lets the man off the hook for

sexual exploitation. (Ann Saltenburger, Every Woman has a Right to Know the Dangers of Legal Abortion, Glassboro, NJ, 1982, p. 132)

Now what about rape? Consider what rape is. Rape is the violent exercise of power and domination over a woman, an attempt to degrade the woman, make her less than human. What happens to the woman who has an abortion? She exercises violent power over the child in her womb, making that child out to be less than human. The abortionist inserts a knife into the same orifice the rapist had expressed *his* power through just days before. The rapist *wanted* destruction and death. By aborting, the woman vindicates his desires, remaking herself in the image of the rapist.

How different a statement is made by giving birth! Where the rapist attempted to express violent power, the woman raises up peaceful weakness. Where the rapist expressed destroying hatred, the woman permits growth in love. Where the rapist desired death, the woman brings forth life. The rape which results in life is a powerful denial of the rapist. The pro-abort may argue that few women will take this point of view, and that is true. But it is true because women have been taught to emulate the rapist, instead of affirming their own biology and womanhood.

4) Abortion is safer than childbirth.

This assertion compares the risk of a surgical procedure generally undertaken before the twelfth week of pregnancy to the risks involved in the *ninth* month of pregnancy. It also assumes the risk calculation of both is reasonable, which is not necessarily the case.

Taking powerful abortifacient hormones and chemicals, having surgery - these things *add* to an individual's health risk, they do not detract from risk. Consider a woman who is one month pregnant. That woman is more likely to be in good health than is a woman who is one month pregnant and is also undergoing a chemical or surgical abortion. No matter what stage of pregnancy you consider, the pregnant woman is safer to be pregnant at that stage than she is to be pregnant and have an abortion. In fact, the risk of abortion rises so rapidly that by the 13th week it is safer to carry the child for the full nine months than it is to have an abortion.

This is true even though the risk calculations are stacked against being pregnant. For instance, ectopic pregnancies (pregnancies in which the conceptus is "stuck" inside the fallopian tube) are very dangerous because the growing child will eventually rupture the tube, causing severe and probably fatal complications. Abortions only empty the uterus - they don't touch the fallopian tubes. According to CDC rules, if a woman with an undiagnosed ectopic pregnancy has an abortion performed and subsequently becomes ill or dies because her undetected ectopic pregnancy ruptures her fallopian tubes, those problems are ascribed to maternal health risks, not abortion health risks - even if she dies on the abortionist's table.

5) What about ectopic pregnancies? Would you force the woman to die for the sake of the child?

This statement assumes the child is the mother's enemy. The pro-life position assumes the mother and child are friends, not enemies. We oppose abortion because it

is the willful taking of a child's life by a parent. If a parent does not intend the child's death, but the child dies anyway, the parent is not culpable.

Imagine a woman whose fallopian tubes were blocked by an infection. It would be perfectly reasonable for a surgeon to remove the fallopian tubes in order to prevent the woman's death. In an ectopic pregnancy, the child is not an infection, but the child is also not in a healthy place for himself or for his mother. If the surgeon removes the fallopian tube, the child will probably die, but neither the mother nor the surgeon intend the child's death. The procedure would have been carried out no matter what the cause of the blockage had been - unfortunately, it happened to have been the child this time.

Contrast this to a legal abortion. The whole procedure is intended to, designed to bring about the death of the child. If this were otherwise, legal abortion would just be an early C-section. Pro-abortion groups are not fighting for the right to an early C-section. They are fighting for the right to a dead baby.

6) Would you force a woman to carry a malformed fetus to term?

Even if we agreed that children with health problems should be killed, there is another angle to this argument which is often overlooked - the health risk to the child in the womb created by the act of testing, and the health risk to the woman of aborting a child with a problem. The pro-abort often forgets that most children are healthy, and that it is safer to carry to term than it is to have a second or third trimester abortion.

Generally speaking the tests which detect fetal health problems are chorionic villus sampling (CVS - a procedure in which a small part of the placenta is removed and tested), amniocentesis, and ultrasound. Due to technical considerations, these tests

cannot return meaningful results before the tenth week (the twelfth week for amnio) at the absolute earliest. This means the woman is extremely unlikely to obtain an abortion until the second (often the third) trimester. Second and third trimester abortions are not done for reasons of physical health - she would be physically safer if she just carried to term and gave the child up for adoption.

Furthermore, remember that most pregnancies are perfectly normal. Thus, these tests are generally being conducted on a normal child. The probability of amnio/ CVS causing a miscarriage is about the same as the probability of identifying a genetic problem, i.e. about one percent. If the test is being done because the risks of a genetic problem are considered "significant", then it is also safe to say that these two procedures create a "significant" risk of miscarriage. In addition, CVS is associated with an increase in the probability of limb deformities (missing toes, fingers, etc.).

In short, procedures which test for fetal abnormalities increase the probability of harming a child who is almost certainly normal, in order to detect problems whose only "remedy" is a procedure which is several times more dangerous to the woman than simply giving birth. Essentially, many doctors are on a search and destroy mission for handicapped children, and they force healthy babies and mothers to pay the cost.

7) Abortion before conscious thought/viability is acceptable.

If our humanity derives from our consciousness, then those who are asleep or in surgery aren't people. It cannot be argued that the patient was once conscious or will return to consciousness shortly. Corpses used to be conscious - does that make a corpse a person? We have no guarantee that the unconscious tissue mass will wake

up. Are there lower limits to what is acceptable for conscious thought? Do you need a certain level of intelligence to be human? If so, does this mean Down's syndrome children aren't human? If we beat you in debate, can we safely kill you?

Viability refers to one's ability to continue to survive. Note that the term presupposes that the entity in question is already alive - the term questions only whether the person will survive much longer. Remember, viability is a measure of technology, not humanity. If viability *did* measure humanity, then a child born prematurely in Zaire would be less human than a child born prematurely in the US, black children in the U.S. (who have a higher mortality rate than white children would be less human than white children. Navy sailors trapped in a submarine, mountain climbers caught in a snowstorm, the Apollo 13 astronauts - the viability of each is in question, therefore, they are not human.

8) If the embryo is "potential life" then why not the sperm or unfertilized egg?

The statement assumes the embryo is implicitly only "potential" human life, and thus no different from a sperm or egg. Yet, consider the differences between the male and female gametes and the fertilized egg.

If an unfertilized egg is left alone in the woman's body, it will never develop into anything. It is all that it can be. You may argue that it can be fertilized, and that is certainly true, but then it's no longer an unfertilized egg, a cell with a single strand of DNA. The egg requires the action of an outside agency to attain this changed state. Its substance is materially altered by that outside agency, the change does not derive from within itself. The unfertilized egg has no potential beyond what it already is.

If a spermatozoon is left alone in a man's body, it will never develop into anything. It is all that it can be. You may argue that it can fertilize an egg, and that is certainly true, but then it no longer exists at all. Its action on another cell essentially destroys its existence as an independent entity. The change requires an outside agency, it does not derive from within itself. The spermatozoon has no potential beyond what it already is.

A fertilized egg is a created entity, created by a clearly defined, uniquely suited act. If left alone in a woman's body, it will - by itself - alter itself. Unlike either of the gametes discussed above, this entity has a full complement of unique DNA, and it is capable of, indeed, it is designed for, incredible self-modification and growth.

Furthermore, the act which creates the entity is clearly defined and uniquely assigned to this task. As adult human beings who are responsible for their actions, the act clearly lays responsibility for the care of the new human being created on the couple who acted to create. Not only does the entity itself demonstrate its own unique human life, the act leading to that creation itself creates a unique, clearly-defined responsibility in both partners towards the new life.

9) Men don't have a right to an opinion on abortion, they do not have a right to oppress women by forcing a woman to carry a child to term.

There are two remarkable assumptions here, but both are deeply veiled. The first is bound up in the idea that a woman is oppressed by carrying a child. Implicitly, the fertile woman is the only creature on the face of the earth who is oppressed by her own biology. Her own biology is an enemy which must be subdued through chemical

castration (the Pill, Norplant), physical devices, or surgery. In this mindset, a woman's freedom from oppression derives from her sterility, not her fecundity. When this is pointed out to a pro-abortion, they will attempt to find an analogy - "using the Pill is like taking aspirin for a headache, or taking antibiotics for an infection". It is worthwhile pointing out that this compares a perfectly healthy and normal aspect of female biology to an illness. Does a normally functioning female body require medical intervention by the very fact of its existence? What "fault" is being "corrected"?

The second assumption is quite indirect. It is assumed that men have no rights, but it assumes that they do have responsibilities. These responsibilities are imposed *by the woman*. The argument which follows is often the key to breaking down the pro-choice wall. In the final analysis, biological arguments about the unborn child generally fail. Trying to prove the child to be a human being through biological arguments is very similar to trying to prove the existence of God - unless the person you are talking to has had a direct experience with a child in utero, they are unlikely to be swayed. When the underlying assumption involved in this above statement is unveiled, the pro-abortion often gets *extremely* upset. If the argument is presented well, you will be treated to the spectacle of a pro-abortion using pro-life arguments in an attempt to refute the logic.

Pro-life: "Is the choice to have sex a choice to have a child?"

Answer: "No"

Pro-life: "No child exists at conception, right?"

Answer: "Of course not."

Pro-life: "When would you say that a child clearly exists?"

Answer: [the answer here doesn't matter. Agree to use whatever time limit they choose].

Pro-life: "A woman may have an abortion for whatever reason she chooses, correct?"

Answer: "Of course."

Pro-life: "Men and women have equal rights?"

Answer: "As long as abortion is legal, yes."

Pro-life: "Alright. Who creates children?"

Answer: "What do you mean?"

Pro-life: "Well, since we know there is no child at conception, the child must be created at some point X, well after conception. Now, the man only has sex. He's not there after conception (indeed, conception may take place hours after the sexual act). It is only at point X that a child exists. Therefore, the woman alone creates the child through the act of gestation. Legal abortion asserts a new thing: sex doesn't create children, gestation creates children. Sex merely creates a fertilized egg, a tissue mass.

Men don't get pregnant. Men don't create children. Men simply provide sperm. They provide one-half of a set of blueprints. The woman provides not only the other half, but the building site, the construction materials, she oversees the project, and she can destroy the whole thing anytime she wants. The man has got nothing to do with it. The existence of a child is not his responsibility - he has no choice, he's done nothing to create responsibility except have sex, and we already know that the decision to have sex is not a decision to have children, nor does it create a child.

So, the idea of compelling child support from the man is really a carry-over from the patriarchy, when men were thought to share responsibility for the existence of a

child. Now that legal abortion has liberated us from those archaic ideas, we should throw away the last remnants of the old oppression.

If the woman wants to have a child, fine. Why should the man pay to support her lifestyle, her choice? If she can have an abortion for whatever reason she wants, then she is having a child for whatever reason she wants. In neither case does it have anything to do with the man.

Genetics has nothing to do with the problem. Is the man's twin brother equally responsible for his child? Are you legally responsible for supporting your parents? No, to both. It is equally nonsense to say that the act of impregnation creates responsibility - if the woman has no responsibility towards a child who isn't there, how much less does the man? Indeed, according to the law, an anonymous sperm donor can never be held for child support, even if he desires to be considered the child's father. What's the difference between an anonymous sperm donor and one whose name you happen to know? The second just has a slightly more personal form of delivery. In both cases, the child exists only because the woman decides to allow it to exist. You might argue that the child wouldn't exist without him, but neither would a Ford pickup truck exist without raw materials from US Steel. Yet we don't hold US Steel responsible for the existence of the pickup truck - we hold responsible the one who built it.

Consider a woman who has identical twin boys. One grows up to be a carpenter, the other grows up to be an in vitro fertilization (IVF) specialist. The carpenter gets married, and he and his wife decide to have a child by IVF. The carpenter asks his brother to do the honors, and his brother readily agrees. The carpenter donates his sperm, the doctor extracts an egg from the wife, fertilizes it with sperm, and implants it

in the wife's womb. Who is the father? After all, the doctor used sperm genetically indistinguishable from his own and impregnated the carpenter's wife. Doesn't that make him the father? Is he responsible for child support? If not, then why is the carpenter?

If you *really* believe that men don't have a right to a voice simply because they don't get pregnant, then you darn well ought to support the demolition of existing child support laws. After all, as you say, this child-creation business has nothing to do with men.

Don't expect these arguments to change hearts in minutes. They won't. However, clear exposition of the life-affirming teachings of the Church, even when presented in a secular style such as this, will sway hearts and minds. Pro-abortion advocates often accept many of the underlying principles espoused by pro-life advocates, even though their rhetoric appears to contradict it. When you can demonstrate the essential self-contradiction of the pro-abort position, you will have gone a long way towards leading these people home.