



## The Prolife High Ground: Effective Responses to Prochoice Arguments

By Barrett Duke, Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission - March 22, 2001

Her lunch hour was over, and Jennifer was devastated. An hour earlier, she had made what to her seemed like a reasonable statement. She said she couldn't imagine how a woman could abort her baby. Immediately, she was overwhelmed with arguments supporting abortion. Jennifer was certain there were good responses to these prochoice arguments, but she couldn't come up with any. The thought that she had appeared uncaring and uninformed grieved her. If only she had known what to say, perhaps someone in that lunch room might have reconsidered the entire abortion issue.

Jennifer's experience is typical of Christians with deeply held beliefs about abortion. Those of us who are prolife often find ourselves in the minority when we are outside of our churches and close circle of friends. Like Jennifer, our challenge is to offer reasonable, compassionate answers in a loving manner when we are confronted with prochoice arguments.

There was a time when we could simply point out that advances in prenatal medicine have illuminated the world of an unborn child not even imagined when the United States Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973. Today, however, most prochoice people agree that this unborn entity is a developing human being. Nevertheless, they still support a woman's right to abortion.

Today, a conversation about abortion with someone who is prochoice will explore numerous arguments that are often pressed with deep conviction and emotion. Though this interaction may be difficult, it will yield great rewards. If we can answer prochoice arguments successfully, we will have the peace of knowing we have spoken up for the unborn, represented our beliefs well, and given those who are prochoice compelling reasons to reconsider their position. Achieving these tremendously fulfilling goals requires knowledge of the main prochoice arguments and some basic effective responses.

The most popular prochoice argument is that a woman has the right to make decisions about her own body. We can agree that everyone should have a certain amount of control over what happens to them, but, truthfully, the idea of absolute control does not exist. There are already laws limiting a woman's rights over her body. A woman is not permitted by law to commit suicide, she cannot sell her body parts, and, except in Nevada, she cannot sell her body.

An even greater problem with the rights argument is the reality that the unborn baby is not part of his mother's body. The baby will often have a different blood type, and his DNA will not be the same as his mother's. Since the baby is not part of his mother's body, he has rights as well. Our society has laws that limit a person's exercise of freedom in order to protect the rights of others. In other words, the right to choose ends at the point where the rights of another begin.

Often, prochoice advocates counter by claiming that the unborn baby is not a person yet and so he has no rights. This is one of the arguments used by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973. Those who make this claim argue that personhood, and its attendant legal protections, occurs only at a certain stage of human development, such as viability, consciousness, or some level of social capacity. However, many states reject this distinction. For example, Arkansas recognizes the personhood of babies of twelve weeks gestation for some criminal cases, and in South Carolina a woman was recently convicted of murdering her unborn baby by smoking crack.

Furthermore, if personhood is determined by some standard other than simply being human, we can ask why it wouldn't be appropriate to kill anyone who doesn't meet the standard. After all, a one day old post-natal baby is as helpless as a full-term unborn baby, and some bedridden people are as helpless and incapable of social interaction as full-term unborn babies.

Another prominent prochoice argument is that an unwanted baby is better off not being born. Our first objection to this assertion is that there is no such thing as an unwanted baby. Today, thousands of people are waiting for the chance to adopt a baby. In addition, the assertion that the unwanted should not be given the chance to live has very frightening implications for other people. If we can kill unborn babies because we don't want them, how can we prevent people from killing their infirm parents or their handicapped children?

Some contend that whether or not a woman wants her baby is not the issue. They note that when a woman becomes pregnant at an inconvenient time or a period of financial stress, a new baby would create significant hardship on the mother and the rest of the family. Perhaps even the father will pressure the mother to abort her baby. While these are certainly real problems, we can insist that they are not adequate reasons for abortion. It is incredibly selfish to kill the unborn baby rather than giving her up for adoption. If the father is pushing for abortion, the mother should do all she can to find an alternative solution.

Often a woman's right to choose is defended because women bear the primary burden of raising children and are therefore denied equal access to the opportunities available to men. The most forthright response to this defense is that the woman was aware of the risks when she engaged in sexual activity. Certainly, when we employ this response, we need to concede that there are instances when the woman is coerced into sexual activity. However, nearly all unwanted or unplanned pregnancies involve consensual sex. And even if pregnancy results from some coerced situation, the baby should not have to forfeit her life.

The companion argument of paternal irresponsibility is not convincing either. We can interject that a father's failure to take responsibility for his actions is a separate issue, and the baby should not have to die because of it. We can also point out that motherhood is a gift from God. God has blessed women with the marvelous privilege of participating in the creation of new life. This God-given privilege is entrusted solely to women, and as such it grants women a special place in God's plan for His creation. Women should consider conception as a special privilege and treat it with all the respect and wonder it deserves.

Population control is another oft-used argument to support abortion. For some time now, a vocal minority has been insisting that population control is imperative, and that abortion is an effective way to achieve this. Margaret Sanger, the founder of planned parenthood, advocated the use of abortion to control population growth. We can agree that population growth is an important concern, but the predictions of exploding populations and the subsequent worldwide plagues, massive famines, and starvation-motivated nuclear war envisioned by Paul Ehrlich in his 1968 book *The Population Bomb* have not come true.

In fact, most population projections have been revised downward in recent years due to unprecedented low birth rates in most of the world. The United States still has not reached the projected 300 million population projected for it by 1989. Japan is so concerned about low birth rates in their country that it has offered financial incentives to families to encourage them to have more children.

Regardless of the downturn in population projections, however, we can contend that killing people is an unacceptable form of population control. After all, war and disease are also effective ways to limit the population, but no sane person would recommend them as solutions. China provides a chilling example of what abortion-as-population-control can lead to. That country's one-child policy has led some of its citizens to resort to gender-based abortions, aborting female babies out of preference for male babies. This practice betrays a frightening devaluation of women that should never occur, regardless of the size of a population.

A fall-back justification for abortion proposes that since abortion is legal, people have the right to it. A persuasive objection to this argument is that laws are not necessarily just. It is easy enough to mention laws in the past that were unjust, such as laws that legalized slavery. Just 150 years ago slavery was legal in this country. Nevertheless, many people knew that slavery was wrong and would never have considered owning another person just because it was legal. Sometimes legality is more a matter of permission than compulsion—because a behavior is permitted does not mean it should be done. Even in the case of abortion, the U.S. Supreme Court decided a mother has the right to abort her baby, not the duty.

A further response to the legality argument is the most compelling—there is a higher law. There is God's law, and it transcends human law. God's law declares every human being sacred, regardless of his or her stage of biological development. Evidence of the value that God places on the unborn can be found in many Bible passages. In Exodus 23:7 God instructs His people not to kill the innocent. Psalm 127:3 reminds us that children are a gift from the Lord to be received with gratitude from a loving God. The delicate care that God gives to the development of every human being is beautifully expressed in Psalm 139:13-16. Jeremiah 1:5 reminds us that God's personal involvement with people begins in the womb.

When they realize their arguments are ineffective, abortion supporters usually claim that objections to abortion are mostly a matter of personal morality or religious belief. We can affirm this claim by expressing gratitude for morality and the role of religion in shaping morality. When our founding fathers acknowledged that God had given all people certain inalienable rights, including the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, they revealed their reliance on religious belief for the moral principles that have helped make the U.S. the best place in the world to live.

We can add that all of our opposition to abortion does not come from personal morality or religious belief. Our concern for a woman's physical and mental health also fuels this opposition. There is growing evidence that women who have abortions experience a higher incidence of breast cancer, infertility, complications with future pregnancies, and numerous other physical problems. They also often struggle with severe feelings of guilt once they realize the full implications of their act.

What is more, legalized abortion does not remove the dangers to the woman. These dangers are inherent to abortion; they are not the results of back-alley abortion clinics. Making abortion legal does not protect a woman from these kinds of complications. The only thing legalized abortion does is put more women at risk.

When all the arguments are met and every counterpoint has been offered, we can make one final point. With deep sincerity, we can ask the prochoice person if he or she would have preferred to have been aborted. Given the opportunity to choose, most people would not choose death. Even many people who

attempt suicide are not actually trying to kill themselves. They don't want to die; they just don't know any other solution to their problem.

What is more, even those who do choose death, want to make that choice for themselves. Most of the world is outraged by the recent decision of The Netherlands to legalize euthanasia. This outrage stems from the fact that most people believe that no one should decide when someone else deserves to die, except in the most extreme cases of violence against another. If we are appalled at the thought that someone would make life and death decisions for others simply because they consider their lives to be no longer of value, surely the same compassion should extend to the womb. The unborn baby should have the same right of self-determination as anyone else. The argument that the baby can't speak for herself yet and so therefore can't be consulted about her preference for life or death is hollow since we don't accept that argument for other people who can't speak for themselves, except under the most extreme cases, like brain death.

After everything has been said, it is quite possible that we will not persuade our prochoice friends right there on the spot. Nevertheless, we can be confident that we have presented very solid answers to their strongest arguments and given them good food for thought. Beyond this, what is most important, or perhaps more important, is the way we live our lives. Many of those who disagree with us on the issue of abortion are curious to know if there is anything really fundamentally different between them and us. It will be very important for them to see that the prolife position is part of a larger philosophy of life.

This is the final answer to those who are prochoice. The Christian philosophy of life that leads to a prolife position produces a highly desirable and richly rewarding life that will be the envy of many who are prochoice. This victorious life may be just the catalyst that causes them to reconsider their own philosophy of life. If they do this, they are more likely to adopt a prolife position on the unborn.

As we talk with those who differ with us on this crucial issue, we should remember that God is prolife. He will work with us and through us as we share our beliefs in love. We can be confident that God will bless our every witness for Him and bring many people to value all life, especially the most innocent of us all – our babies.