

‘How Dare They Tell Youngsters Abortion Is Bad!’

I used to refrain from saying very much about abortion for fear of getting myself embroiled in an argument regarding an issue about which I don't know very much. Which is to say, that I don't know enough to guarantee that I will be able to respond to all the objections I might come against. And so cannot guarantee that I will win the argument.

But as a Christian, we are not called to win arguments. We are called to be witnesses—to testify to as much truth as we know. And in the process of stepping out beyond our comfort zones to speak boldly in defence of the little truth we know, we will find ourselves being confronted with questions to which we don't yet know the answers—which will then push us to search for more answers, to understand more of the truth.



So, I am repenting of my fear of man and resolving to not let my lack of comprehensive knowledge keep me silent.

In particular, this week I present to you some thoughts cobbled together in belated response to the recent uproar over a Cambridge Year 10 Religious Studies class having a debate on the issue of abortion, in which the pro-choice Feminist Action Cambridge and the pro-life Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) each presented their case.

What happened to our proud tradition of free speech?

One might think that in a city which has the oldest debating society in the world, to have a controversial issue discussed by two parties of opposite opinions wouldn't be anything to speak of. But details of the presentation were "disclosed to the Guardian", which then published an article with the provocative title, 'Revealed: what children are being told about abortion'. Stephen Munday, principal of the school in question, then had to send out a letter to parents explaining that, contrary to the impression given by the Guardian's slant on the story, it was not the case that the only information students were being given about abortion was coming from pro-life campaigners, but rather that this was part of a balanced dialogue in which both points of view were represented.

But what was it that students had been told? Well, according to the details obtained by the Guardian, students had been told "abortions are linked to a raised risk of breast cancer".

Is this really about breast cancer?

"The causes of breast cancer are not fully understood" ([NHS Website](#))

[This SPUC document](#) explains in measured tones that "Whether breast cancer risk is elevated by abortion is a controversial question that has been the subject of numerous studies, several showing increased risk and some showing none". But goes on to point out that since it is a "well established fact that carrying a first pregnancy to birth is protective against breast cancer... this means that a woman [who is pregnant and considering abortion] will have higher breast cancer risk if she undergoes an abortion compared to carrying to term".

But before we start arguing about whether the above argument is valid or not, we should probably step back and point out that whether or not abortion is linked to breast cancer has no bearing at all on the essential moral question of abortion—which is this: is the unborn child (the foetus) a real human being entitled to the same rights and privileges that anyone gains simply by virtue of being a mere human? Or is there something more than being biologically human that is required to gain 'human rights'?

How you answer this question should immediately decide the question of whether you are pro-life or pro-choice. It will also have some obvious effects on how you talk about the consequences of abortion.

The reason for this is simple. If you think that there is nothing morally problematic about abortion in itself—and are therefore pro-choice—then when you hear horrible stories about backstreet abortions with horrendous consequences, then you will conclude that abortion should be made safer so that those who choose to abort their unborn babies will not have to suffer in such ways. Whereas if you think that unborn babies are still human babies entitled to the same human rights as you or me, then you will see in such horrible backstreet abortion stories a vivid picture of the suffering that abortion causes, and you will conclude that we must work harder to provide support to women so that they do not feel like abortion is their only option.

Now before we go on, let's just say—

It isn't just evangelical Christians who are anti-abortion.

"Children were shown a video by a Christian campaigner from the USA who calls for abortion to be made 'unthinkable'." ([Guardian article](#))

One sometimes gets the impression that in the minds of the British public, to be against abortion is almost synonymous with being "a Christian campaigner from the USA".

So it is worth pointing out that this is not the case.

There are [pro-life Hindus](#) who argue that abortion runs contrary to the principle of *ahimsa*, non-violence. There are [pro-life Jews](#), who argue that condoning abortion "promotes the eugenics movement which historically has targeted Jews for extinction". As "Al Qur'an and the sayings (ahadith/sunnah) teach that it is prohibited to intentionally end the life of any unborn child (abortion) or to kill oneself or assist someone to end their life", there are [pro-life Muslims](#).

But this isn't a religious issue—there are also [pro-life atheists](#), such as [this progressive liberal](#) who argues that: *"From this leftist viewpoint, opposition to abortion is not an aberration, but a natural, organic and logical outgrowth of one's leftist whole. In other words, we oppose abortion for the same reasons we oppose violence against women, gays and lesbians, or ethnic minorities. Our anti-abortionism is the only response possible with our dedication to and demand for social justice."*

Or perhaps a better example would be the late Christopher Hitchens: *“As a materialist, I think it has been demonstrated that an embryo is a separate body and entity, and not merely (as some really did used to argue) a growth on or in the female body. There used to be feminists who would say that it was more like an appendix or even—this was seriously maintained—a tumor. That nonsense seems to have stopped. Of the considerations that have stopped it, one is the fascinating and moving view provided by the sonogram, and another is the survival of ‘premature’ babies of feather-like weight, who have achieved ‘viability’ outside the womb. ... The words ‘unborn child,’ even when used in a politicized manner, describe a material reality.”* (God is Not Great pp. 220-21)

So then, rather than writing sensationalist articles about secondary issues, let’s consider the real question. Which, to repeat, is this: Is the unborn child (the foetus) a real human being entitled to the same rights and privileges that anyone gains simply by virtue of being a mere human? Or is there something more than being biologically human that is required to gain ‘human rights’?

Both sides agree—abortion and infanticide are logically identical

Now, it is a biological fact that new life begins at conception. And from the moment of fertilization the foetal life has a full set of human DNA—making the foetus a human being. This isn’t even disputed by those who think that it is acceptable to kill the unborn foetus.

Instead they argue that we must distinguish what it means to be a ‘person’ from what it means to be a mere human. But to this we say, if it’s wrong to kill a developing human being after birth (which legally it still is), why is it permissible to kill the developing human before birth?

Now this is meant to be a proof by contradiction. But a pair of pro-choice medical ethicists were recently in the news for openly embracing the logical conclusion of such an argument that abortion is logically indistinguishable from infanticide. That is, if killing a baby is acceptable before its birth, then there is no reason why it should become unacceptable after the baby’s birth.

They argued: “The moral status of an infant is equivalent to that of a fetus in the sense that both lack those properties that justify the attribution of a right to life to an individual. Rather than being ‘actual persons’, newborns were ‘potential persons’ ...Both a fetus and a newborn certainly are human beings and potential persons, but neither is a ‘person’ in the sense of ‘subject of a moral right to life’. We take ‘person’ to mean an individual who is capable of attributing to her own existence some (at least) basic value such that being deprived of this existence represents a loss to her.” But how do we know what another person would consider a loss? Surely we can only know this if they are able to effectively communicate this to us.

But what about disabled people? I spent an all-too-brief week or two before I came to university volunteering with Bethany Home, a school for disabled children and adults. And a large source of frustration for those struggling with disability was that although they often knew exactly what they wanted, they struggled to communicate this to others.

Indeed, what about a sleeping person? If you were to try and wake me up in the morning, would I be able to coherently ‘attribute to my own existence some basic value’? My wife and my mother could probably both testify that most mornings I’m not able to attribute value to anything very much at all—but I think that in spite of that they wouldn’t deny me the right to live.

I do believe that good can come out of evil

“For some people who’ve been raped and had the baby, even if they don’t keep it, something positive comes out of that whole rape experience,” pupils aged 14 and 15 were told. (Guardian article)

This comment drew a furious response by one of the student's parents—who also happened to be a stem cell research scientist. It was published in the print edition of the Cambridge News but was strangely missing from the [online version](#), so I can't quote him exactly. But (if someone finds the old newspaper in their recycled paper box, then please let me know the exact quote) it was something along the lines of 'How dare they suggest that something good could come out of rape!'

But it shouldn't be so difficult to see that to say that something positive can come out of something evil is not to justify evil, let alone advocate it.

As Christians we unashamedly do believe that good can come out of evil. This is most evident in the death of Jesus, who was betrayed by a friend and then unfairly condemned to death, but who [had to die](#) in order that the sins of the world might be forgiven. But the principle that God can make "all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28) is one that we believe applies to every situation.

And I would argue that this means that as Christians we can offer real hope to a victim of rape—or of any other evil.

I do believe abortion is a sin — but also that sinners can be forgiven!

["God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"](#)

[Statistically](#) in the UK there are about 18 abortions per thousand women each year. So there are doubtless at least a few people who will come across this who have had an abortion.

If you are one of those people, my desire is not to make you feel condemned. My desire is to tell you that "In Christ there is no condemnation" (Rom.8:1)—not because God doesn't name and judge sin, but because "if we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us" (1 Jn. 1:9).

I speak to you as someone who is certainly guilty of what the Bible calls 'sin'. But I speak also as one who has experienced the transforming mercy of Jesus. And I enthusiastically recommend it to you—and to everyone else I know.

'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die?' (Ez. 33:11)

On a related note, highly respected pro-life spokesperson [Phyllis Bowman](#) died this past Monday. May God raise up more prophetic voices like her who would speak out with wisdom and courage in defense of the vulnerably voiceless.

If you're interested in further exploring the arguments against abortion then [Abort73.com](#) is a useful resource.

You can find out about the the history of the iconic image of a mouth sealed shut with red tape inscribed with the word LIFE at [the Bound4Life website](#).