

Making the Best Argument for Unborn Life: Understanding the Racist and Sexist Assumptions of Abortion

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THE RHETORICAL STRUGGLE over the meaning of abortion transcends the significance of almost all political questions. Its profound connection to the origins of human life makes the symbolic transactions over the interpretation of abortion difficult. Public debate has become rigid and for many public sphere experts—predictable. Consequently, the search for compelling and novel approaches to the debate are important. In conventional academic debate, there is a notion of “competitive offense.” This common collegiate notion of debate suggests that advocates must make claims that compel a judge with rationales that make consent to claims urgent. Such “offensive” claims stand in contrast to typical “defensive” claims that merely answer the claims of the opponent. This paper utilizes debate theory to innovate pro-life argumentation toward the development of novel “offensive” arguments to defend unborn life.

ARGUMENT THEORY

A review of basic argument theory is useful to initiate this discussion. One of the simplest, yet most widely accepted views of argument is the Toulmin model. According to Stephen Toulmin, any argument must have three essential components to be accepted by an audience: (1) data, (2) warrant, and (3) claim (1958). Data constitutes the evidence or typically factual basis by which a conclusion will be drawn by a speaker. For example, one might note a statistic such as 35 million abortions that have taken place in the United States since *Roe v. Wade* in order to support a conclusion that abortion is a serious problem in the United States. The statistic constitutes data within this potential argument. As noted, the

third part of the model is the claim. This is simply the conclusion that the speaker or advocate wants the audience to accept. In this example, “abortion is a serious problem in the United States,” is the claim of the argument.

More complicated and theoretically significant is the warrant of an argument. According to Toulmin, the warrant is the unstated rationale for connecting the data and claim. The reasonable nature of an argument is its warrant. Unrelated data and claim are classically thought of as “non-sequiturs.” If I said that this paper is seven pages long and therefore the best paper ever written by a scholar, it would be difficult to warrant that conclusion—it would not seem reasonable. The unstated nature of these reasons makes observation of warrants the most challenging task for argumentation scholars (Toulmin 1958). In the more realistic example in the previous paragraph, the numeric size of the data makes it seem significant and amenable to a claim of seriousness. An audience likely recognizes that such numbers exceed the population of several states and that its implications involve the potential question of child death.

Warrants are conceived within the mind of the audience. Such warrants are built upon assumptions accepted by the audience members. Such assumptions are accumulated through the processes of education and experience. Data and claims of speakers are compared against these accumulated assumptions in order to determine intellectual matches. If audience members can recognize a pattern in their own minds regarding the utilized data and claim, an argument will be completed. If no pattern of connection is apparent, then the argument will fail. Such completions can vary from person to person (Toulmin 1958). A person with unique technical knowledge may be able to supply a warrant to data and claim in a way that a less technically knowledgeable person would be unable to match.

With this theory of argument understood, it would be relatively easy to create something of a catalog of existing arguments both for and against abortion rights. That is not the purpose of this paper. Nonetheless, this theory of argumentation does contribute to the next step of analysis, which is to discover innovative offensive arguments against abortion rights. By “offensive,” it is not meant that the argument upsets the

audience, but rather that they will feel compelled by the argument—they must make a decision on the basis of the claim that has been made rather than on some other issue.

In contemporary debate practice, the “turning of arguments” is taken to be the most direct means for creating offense in a debate. In such argument-events, a speaker rebuts a competing speaker by reversing the causality of their opponent’s claim (Freeley & Steinberg 2000; Rybacki & Rybacki 1996). In classic arguments about drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, it is commonly claimed that such drilling will damage the environment and, therefore, that it should not be done. An advocate who is trying to turn such an argument could produce evidence that existing oil drilling has actually helped the environment. The reversal of the verb “damage” into a positive verb such as “helped” constitutes this argument as a turn. This is to recognize that the warrant of ecology remains intact, while evidence strategically reverses the claim in the favor of the rebuttalist. A purely defensive response would claim that drilling does not hurt the environment or that it hurts it very little. Such a defensive argument will not be able to win the debate for the advocate, according to most argument experts. The offensive argument does have the potential to win the debate. Consequently, such turns are preferred in debate communication contexts.

The efficiency of this argument approach is important. First, the approach utilizes existing warrants already established in the debate. Advocates utilizing a turn do not have to establish new warrants for their arguments. Secondly, the approach utilizes an element of argument to which the opponent has already conceded. It will not be possible for the opponent now to say that the environment is not important since those same warrants were already employed. Issues of time and impact join to make this approach to argument resolution compelling.

The theoretical basis of such offense-based argument is not difficult to understand. Putting such matters into practice is more challenging. It is, therefore, useful to examine the existing argumentation-terrain of abortion in order to understand the potential for offense within the debate. The emphasis of this analysis is to find arguments that help pro-life advocates defend the value of unborn children.

THE EXISTING TERMS OF THE ABORTION DEBATE

Conventionally, abortion tends to emerge within the American public sphere as a struggle between a nominally progressive political base and a morally conservative political base. The progressive political base tends to affirm abortion as a necessary political edifice within a larger domain of rights talk. Conservative moralists tend to defend the preservation value of human life. Since this paper focuses on the potential for turning existing arguments of abortion rights advocates, it is useful to scrutinize the progressive argument-base further.

The abortion rights argument-base tends to affirm abortion practice within a political framework of rights. Most importantly, these political rights are understood as “women’s rights.” The obvious nature of this connection hardly needs elaboration. Nonetheless, from a theoretical standpoint, it is useful to recognize that this is probably the deepest warrant area from which abortion rights claims are drawn. Turning arguments from within this warrant area would be strategic.

Additionally, because abortion rights arguments are derived from notions of identity politics—people’s discrete identities constitute an overriding political concern—it is useful to understand other identity claims that are salient within this nominally progressive community. Among the most salient and compelling identity areas of American politics is race. The salience of race was apparent in the recent political demise of Trent Lott (Novak 2003). Lott’s comments on the retirement of Strom Thurmond were rhetorically cast as proof of his personal connection to the negative social warrants of racism. Regardless of the veracity of these conclusions, it is important to recognize that race based warrants were powerful within the political decision-making base that considered Lott’s problem politically. Here again, the potential for drawing powerful offensive arguments is apparent. Clarence Thomas’s defense against Anita Hill was invigorated by such offense when he characterized the senatorial accusations against him as a “high tech lynching.” This racial history invokes racial warrants in such a powerful way that the decision-makers for Thomas had little choice but to consider that claim as a priority amid the various arguments about his potential

nomination.

Identity politics recently played a role in efforts to oust Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum after he sponsored key legislation on partial-birth abortion. The wife of Jim Jordan, the Democratic presidential campaign-manager of Sen. John Kerry, penned an AP wire news story about Santorum's spoken concerns regarding the impending Supreme Court decision on Texas's sodomy law. When speaking about the variety of sexual practices that might be approved by a decision striking down the law, the reporter inserted the sexual identity term of "gay". In so doing, the article created an identity politics firestorm around Santorum that like Lott, sought to remove him from leadership and power (Jordan 2003). The threat of these argument warrants subsided, but their use in this case continue to demonstrate the offensive power of such claims.

It is apparent that individuals seeking to turn the arguments of abortion-rights advocates would do well to focus on warrants employing identity politics. In the following analysis, I will review important data for formulating such arguments around warrants of race and gender. In so doing, I will establish the most offensive way for advocates of unborn life to make their claims.

ABORTION'S CONNECTION TO SEXISM AND RACISM

Initially, it is most useful to conceptualize abortion rights as a means for the oppression of women. Conventional argumentation in this area has been defensive—it supposes that advocates for the unborn are not against women. A more offensive construction recognizes that abortion advocates themselves are against women. How might such an argument be constructed?

Sex-selection abortion makes abortion the most serious life threat to women on the planet today. An estimated 40 million abortions take place each year around the globe. Because sex-selection typically seeks to destroy the lives of female children, these millions of abortion disproportionately affect women. In fact, gender imbalances are already emerging at significant levels within much of Asia. China is infamous for female infanticide and is documented as facilitating female deaths in the womb as a way of preserving the one-child policy as a one male- child

policy (Kohm 1997). India also suffers from a culture of gender-cide, for women are born at a 800 to 1,000 ratio to men (Terzieff 2002), apart from the direct and staggering carnage of female deaths in the womb. The social manifestations are also abhorrent from a feminist standpoint.

As the number of women has declined within these societies, the scarcity of females has contributed to a dramatic rise in anti-woman behavior in these societies. Of particular note are forced female prostitution and female slavery (Terzieff 2002). Because these societies increasingly lack the females to make conventional human marriages of men and women, they facilitate sexual arrangements that demean and destroy women. Abortion is the critical catalyst toward a run-away cycle of violence against women. Women become subordinate to a political and social majority of men who see them as means to their own ends. Any feminist notion of patriarchy could have no greater ally in the perpetuation of female abuse than the sociological meat-grinder of sex-selection abortion. These practices are well documented by the international community and offer a compelling basis for representing abortion as a means to oppress women (Hudson, V. M. & Boer 2002, Blumner 2003).

Although privacy laws privileging the abortion industry tend to limit our knowledge of American abortion practice in this area, there is good evidence that sex-selection abortion does take place within the United States. The existence of such practices indicates a complicity in symbolizing women as inherently inferior and so thoroughly defective as to be worthy of discard. Thrusting the apparent sexism of abortion practice before the public and political bodies is an important basis for turning the argument of “women’s rights.”

It is also useful to extend the mantra of “choice” into the realm of the unborn female child. Should such a child have control over her own body? Phrasing the abortion rights dilemma in such a familiar but damaging way puts almost any abortion rights activist on the defensive. From an argumentation standpoint, there is little choice but to rhetorically attack the dignity of the unborn female child—an attack that has great potential to appear as a discriminatory and insensitive view of women. Moreover, such a question extends the claim of “choice” across all

female bodies, not simply those born. It then becomes necessary for the abortion advocate to re-establish a bright line of lifelessness for the child.

In addition to seeing abortion as an act of violence targeted at women in the womb, it is useful to recognize how abortion facilitates sexist practices against the mothers who carry unborn children. Abortion is a reproductive technology that facilitates the female body as a means of sexual service for men. The evidence of this can be found in the sociological data surrounding “women’s choices” to have abortions. In the mythological world of abortion rights advocates, women choose abortions (although unborn women have no such choice) in order to remove an obstacle to personal advancement. In practice, abortions are often sought at the behest of male counterparts who do not want the looming responsibility of fatherhood or financial obligation that may come with the birth of a child. This keeps sexual relations in the terms of the male—a recreational outlet with a secure terminus in abortion. Women often want to keep a child in pregnancy but are pressured by men—and even by the larger society—to destroy the life of the unborn child. Such pressures are intimately associated with the notions of “patriarchy” that are assailed by many an abortion rights activist. Here again, a strategic turn in the argument is apparent.

Moreover, abortion as a reproductive medical technology increasingly moves women away from the role of decision-makers toward passivity. The partial-birth abortion debate revealed a peculiar and bizarre industry of powerful medical doctors rationalizing women’s decision-making by characterizing the brutal late-term practice as “medically necessary.” Although no amount of congressional cross-examination or public press comment has been able to create a stable textual understanding of how late-term abortion is not brutal, the explanations inevitably sideline the mother as a passive agent without “medical expertise.” Consequently, abortion rights advocates increasingly synthesize the medical establishment with the mother and describe the abortion choice as one to be made “by a woman *and* her doctor.” Presumably, a woman could never make such an important decision on her own. Such patronizing language clearly demeans women and seeks to subordinate them to a rhetorically significant agent such as the medical

abortion industry (Gibson 2001).

The apparent disconnect between women's interests and abortion is most apparent when we look at the truest origins of American feminism within first-wave feminism of the 19th century. These feminists consistently recognized abortion as socially abhorrent and a detriment to women. There seemed to be little confusion on the point that abortion was part of men's larger injustices toward women. A host of quotations convey the point clearly. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a nineteenth-century feminist, classified abortion as "infanticide" (*The Revolution*, 1(5):1, February 5, 1868). In a letter to fellow activist Julia Ward Howe she explained: "When we consider that woman are treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our children as property to be disposed of as we see fit" (October 16, 1873). Stanton provides a compelling summary of the anti-feminism found in abortion when she wrote:

We are living to-day under a dynasty of force; the masculine element is everywhere overpowering the feminine, and crushing women and children alike beneath its feet. Let woman assert herself in all her native purity, dignity, and strength, and tend this wholesale suffering and murder of helpless children. With centuries of degradation, we have so little of true womanhood, that the world has but the faintest glimmering of what a woman is or should be. (*The Revolution* 1(4): 57-58, January 29, 1868).

Susan B. Anthony, one of America's most famous suffragists and activists, explained abortion this way:

Guilty? Yes. No matter what the motive, love of ease, or a desire to save from suffering the unborn innocent, the woman is awfully guilty who commits the deed. It will burden her conscience in life, it will burden her soul in death; But oh, thrice guilty is he who drove her to the desperation which impelled her to the crime! (*The Revolution*, 4(1):4, July 8, 1869)

We want prevention, not merely punishment. We must reach the root of the evil.... It is practiced by those whose inmost souls revolt from the dreadful deed. (*The Revolution*, 4(1): 4, July 8, 1869)

All the articles on this subject that I have read have been from men. They

denounce women as alone guilty, and never include man in any plans for the remedy. (*The Revolution*, 4(1):4, July 8, 1869)

Victoria Woodhull, the first female presidential candidate was a strong opponent of abortion:

The rights of children as individuals begin while yet they remain the foetus. (*Woodhull's and Claffin's Weekly* 2(6):4, December 24, 1870)

Every woman knows that if she were free, she would never bear an unwished-for child, nor think of murdering one before its birth. (*Wheeling, West Virginia Evening Standard*, November 17, 1875)

ABORTION AND RACE

The power of race is a haunting legacy in America. The suffering of American blacks during slavery provides a historical exigence to an ongoing struggle to achieve equality. Peculiar in this struggle is the alliance of the African American community with abortion rights advocates. Fewer than 10% of African Americans voted for the presidential candidate defending the rights of unborn children. This statistic is true despite the fact that almost 4 in 10 abortions are against an African American child. Everyday 1,600 African American children are killed in the womb within the United States alone. This means that abortion has been the most efficient racial tool the nation has ever known, having taken the lives of more than 10 million children in this community. These statistics are more than mere proportion. These lost lives are part of a consistent plan of racism.

Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger conceived of abortion as one of a number of birth-control methods as means to limit and reduce the size of cultures that she deemed inferior and dangerous. Asians and African Americans were considered important social targets for her program. Absent such controls, weaker races would grow like “weeds” to destroy white culture (Sanger 1922). Sanger’s visions were every bit as vile as the Klu Klux Klan—although accentuated by evolutionary scientists who saw her vision as complementary to the creation of a stronger human race. Sanger’s vision was so thoroughly connected with

the Nazi vision of World War II that Sanger and other abortion leaders had to change the name of the organization to its new name of “Planned Parenthood” (*Encyclopedia of Associations* 1980). As the nation’s current largest abortion provider, Planned Parenthood was conceived as a racist agenda to exterminate African Americans (Popenoe 1933; Mosher 1997).

Despite its abhorrent origins, Planned Parenthood continues to locate its clinics disproportionately in African American communities today. In today’s world of racial sensitivity it is a profound wonder how advocates for unborn life fail to focus public attention on the racial discrepancies of abortion practice in the United States. Here again, the potential for turning a powerfully explosive political argument remains under-utilized.

Family planning outside the United States continues with racial premises. Lower economic groups outside the United States are targeted as in need of family planning. Although most, if not all, of these cultures and groups value family and even large family sizes, American family planners “know best.” Patronizing language at UN and international conferences reassure donors that target countries need family planning. Even if cultural traditions must be undermined and reshaped, it is an important and worthy goal. “Population control” has been and continues to be a buzz term only thinly covering the racial contempt for the human “weeds” that grow out of control (Sanger 1922).

Both inside the United States and within the global community, abortion is working out the racist vision of its most admired founder Margaret Sanger. Extending the evolutionary science model of racist nineteenth-century thinkers, reproductive service advocates like Sanger envisioned a master race that would someday dominate a planet cleansed of weaker dark “others.” As transparent as these intentions were and as evident as the effects are, advocates against abortion rights fail to utilize the powerful warrant of race to indict abortion rights advocates. Why are Planned Parenthood clinics disproportionately located in African American communities? Why is it that as abortion rates have gone down in the United States during the past five years, abortions rendered by Planned Parenthood have gone up (Planned Parenthood Federation of

America's 2000-2001 Annual Report, 2001)? Planned Parenthood is promoting abortion strategically against groups Sanger envisioned as needing it most. The ramifications for African American culture have been more catastrophic than any known racial ill, yet advocates for these unborn victims of racism remain relatively silent compared to more shrill racial advocates on the other side of the debate.

CONCLUSIONS

Abortion as one of the most contentious issues in American political history, has worn the public into a weariness about the arguments. Consequently, it is incumbent upon advocates of the unborn to innovate their arguments in ways that can re-energize the debate and move public policy forward to a fuller recognition of *what* it means to be human. Because American public policy relies so much upon advocacy, argument, and debate, it is useful to utilize advanced aspects of argumentation theory to innovation pro-life argumentation.

Argument theorists Stephen Toulmin explains that arguments are composed of three necessary components: (1) data, (2) warrant, and (3) claim. The most strategic and evasive of these elements is the warrant—an unspoken rationale which connects data and claim to produce a reasonable argument in the mind of the audience. Contemporary debate theory suggests that offensive arguments—arguments that compel the audience to make a decision on that singular issue are most likely to win a public dispute. Offensive arguments are most effectively achieved by “turning” the argument of the opponent. Such turns are achieved by utilizing the same warrants as the opponent but reversing the claim. Such efficient approaches to argument can be achieved with careful research into useful data that could support such claims.

In this study it is found that warrants of racism and sexism can be usefully turned by advocates of unborn life. Abortion in design and practice promotes discrimination against African Americans and women. This discrimination is widespread and catastrophic in its impact. The profoundly racist and sexist nature of abortion has the potential to render its practice obscene within America's public sphere if properly articulated by defenders of the unborn children who suffer with these

attacks.

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