

Dr. James S. Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 11, Abortion (Part 2)

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 11, Abortion (Part 2), Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This source presents arguments within Christian ethics regarding abortion, specifically exploring pro-life perspectives. It summarizes philosopher Don Marquis' view that killing is wrong because it deprives an individual of a valuable future, extending this to fetuses without focusing on personhood. The discussion then covers Alexander Proust's argument emphasizing the continuity of identity from fetus to adult, suggesting that if killing an adult is wrong, so is killing a fetus. Finally, it addresses common pro-choice arguments and offers rebuttals from a Christian philosophical perspective, including biblical considerations.

**2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 11 – Double click icon to
play in Windows media player or go to the
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link
there (Theology → Apologetics → Christian Ethics).**



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ession11.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 11, Abortion (Part 2)

Briefing Document: Arguments for the Pro-Life Position on Abortion

Source: Excerpts from "Spiegel_Ethics_EN_Ses11.pdf", Dr. James S. Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 11, Abortion, Part 2

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1. Introduction:

This briefing document summarizes the main arguments presented in Dr. James S. Spiegel's lecture on Christian Ethics, specifically Session 11, Part 2, focusing on arguments in favor of the pro-life position on abortion. Spiegel outlines philosophical arguments from Don Marquis and Alexander Proust, responses to pro-choice arguments by Frank Beckwith, and biblical perspectives often used to support the pro-life stance. He also addresses common pro-choice arguments and identifies a key fallacy he believes they commit.

2. Philosophical Arguments for the Pro-Life Position:

2.1. Don Marquis: The Wrongfulness of Killing and the Deprivation of a Valuable Future:

- Marquis argues that to understand the abortion debate, we need a clear understanding of why killing is wrong when it is wrong. He dismisses reasons like brutalization or the victim being missed.
- **Core Argument:** Marquis posits that "the loss of one's life deprives one of all the experiences, activities, projects, and enjoyments that would otherwise have constituted one's future." Therefore, killing is wrong because it inflicts "one of the greatest possible losses on the victim."
- **Implications:** This view extends the wrongfulness of killing beyond biologically human beings to include animals with a potentially valuable future.
- It does not necessarily condemn active euthanasia in cases where an individual is terminally ill and facing a painful end, as the future being taken away may not be considered valuable.

- Crucially, it *does* account for the wrongfulness of killing children, infants, and fetuses, *without* relying on the concept of fetal personhood. Spiegel emphasizes, "Notice that, in his view, there's no attention given to the notion of fetal personhood...even if you grant that the fetus is not a person, his argument seems to have some pro-life implications here, even conceding that point."
- The argument allows for the moral permissibility of contraception because there is no individual entity (sperm, ovum, or unconceived combination) being deprived of a valuable future.
- **Responses to Critiques:** Regarding the argument that a fetus is not the same entity as an adult, Marquis argues that while they are not the same *person*, they are the same *organism* at different stages of development. Spiegel quotes, "the fact that they are not the same person or entity does not prove that they are not one and the same organism."
- Concerning the weight of a woman's autonomy, Marquis contends that his argument focuses on the wrongness of depriving a fetus of a future and that the issue of whether a woman's right to control her body trumps this remains a separate question. Spiegel quotes, "His conclusion is that abortion is a *prima facie* serious wrong...But the question remains open whether a woman's right to control her own body trumps that concern about the serious moral wrong of abortion."

2.2. Alexander Proust: "I Once Was a Fetus" and the Continuity of Organism:

- Proust's argument begins with the simple premise, "I once was a fetus. You once were a fetus. Each of us was once a fetus."
- **Core Argument:** If it is wrong to kill an adult now, then it was wrong to kill that same organism when it was a fetus. Therefore, it is wrong to kill a fetus whenever it is wrong to kill an adult in similar circumstances. Spiegel states, "if you kill me now, you would be killing the same organism that you would have killed if you had aborted me as a fetus. We are one in the same organism."
- **Support:** Proust emphasizes the continuous nature of the organism from conception to adulthood, even with changes in physical form. Spiegel notes, "The organism that was conceived by my mother nine months before my birth...never died. It's not merely part of me but is continuous with me. So, I am the same individual organism as that fetus."

- **Addressing the Twinning Objection:** Proust argues that the possibility of a blastocyst splitting into twins (occurring in about 1 out of 260 cases) does not negate the fact that it is initially a "genuine individual organism."
- **Moral Wrongness:** Killing a fetus is argued to be as morally wrong as, if not worse than, killing an adult because the fetus has a potentially longer valuable future. Spiegel quotes, "killing that fetus, therefore, is as morally wrong as, if not worse than, killing me now...Because that fetus had a much longer valuable future than I have now as someone in his 50s."
- **Addressing Objections:** In cases where the mother's life is in danger or the fetus is unhealthy, Proust suggests these should be treated with the same ethical considerations as similar situations involving adults.
- Regarding the argument that an embryo that never becomes a person doesn't have the same rights as one that does, Daniel Propson (defending Proust) argues that abortion prevents the embryo from becoming a person.

3. Frank Beckwith's Responses to Pro-Choice Arguments:

- **Safety of Abortion vs. Childbirth:** Beckwith refutes the argument that abortion is significantly safer than childbirth for the mother. While acknowledging the lower mortality rate in first-trimester abortions (1 in 100,000) compared to childbirth (9 in 100,000), he argues that the actual difference in survival rates (99.999% vs. 99.991%, a difference of 0.008%) is "statistically insignificant." Furthermore, he asserts that the "special moral obligation that one has to one's offspring far outweighs the relative danger one avoids by not acting on that moral obligation," even if childbirth were significantly more dangerous.
- **Critique of Judith Jarvis Thompson's Violinist Analogy:** Beckwith raises several points against the analogy:
- **Voluntary vs. Natural Obligation:** Thompson's analogy assumes duties to offspring must be voluntary, which Beckwith argues is "fatal to family morality." He emphasizes that obligations to one's children exist regardless of intent or choice. Spiegel notes, "We certainly don't disregard a man's duties to his offspring just because he unintentionally impregnated a woman."
- **Natural Dependence:** Unlike the artificially created dependence of the violinist, the unborn child has a "natural dependence upon the mother." Beckwith argues that comparing the unborn to an "artificially connected stranger...undermines the natural bond between a mother and her child."

4. Biblical Arguments for the Pro-Life View:

- **Creation by God and Intimate Knowledge (Psalm 139:13-16):** This passage highlights God's active and intimate involvement in the creation of the unborn within the mother's womb. Spiegel quotes, "For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb...Your eyes saw my unformed body." This suggests the unborn have inherent value and are known by God.
- **God's Calling Before Birth (Jeremiah 1:5 and others):** Passages like Jeremiah 1:5 ("Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you") indicate that God has a plan and purpose for individuals even before their birth, implying personhood or significant value in the pre-born stage. Spiegel also mentions Galatians 1, Isaiah 49, Judges 13, and Genesis 25 as other examples.
- **Unborn Babies Called Children (Luke 1):** The description of the baby John the Baptist leaping in Elizabeth's womb upon Mary's arrival, and the reference to the pre-born as "baby" or "child," are interpreted as indicating their status as human beings.
- **Exodus 21 (Interpretation of "Yetzu Yeladeha"):** This passage concerning men fighting and hitting a pregnant woman with subsequent premature birth is crucial. Spiegel notes that the literal Hebrew phrase "yetzu yeladeha" means "her child comes out," without specifying miscarriage. If interpreted as premature birth (live or stillborn), the subsequent penalties for further injury, including "life for life," could apply to the child, making it a strong pro-life passage. However, incorrect translation as "miscarriage" weakens this interpretation.

5. Fallacy in Common Pro-Choice Arguments:

- Spiegel argues that many common pro-choice arguments, such as "a woman has the right to do with her own body as she chooses," the fear of back-alley abortions, potential financial hardships, and not wanting unwanted or handicapped children, all commit the "fallacy of begging the question."
- **Reasoning:** These arguments assume that the fetus is not a person with moral rights. If the fetus *is* considered a person with rights, then the mother's bodily autonomy is not absolute, as it involves another individual. Concerns about back-alley abortions, financial burdens, and unwanted children become secondary to the right to life of a human being. Spiegel quotes Scott Ray, stating that these arguments "assume that the fetus is not a person and has no moral rights. Because if the fetus is a person and has all the moral rights that you or I have,

then to say that a woman has the right to do what she wants with her own body as she chooses is irrelevant because the fetus is not just a part of her own body, but a distinct human person."

6. Conclusion:

Dr. Spiegel's lecture presents a detailed overview of philosophical and biblical arguments supporting the pro-life position on abortion. The arguments from Marquis and Proust offer secular ethical frameworks grounded in the value of a future and the continuity of the human organism. Beckwith critiques common pro-choice arguments, challenging their premises and highlighting alternative interpretations. Finally, the biblical passages are presented as providing theological support for the inherent value and personhood of the unborn. Spiegel concludes by asserting that many common pro-choice arguments presuppose the very issue under debate, namely the moral status of the fetus.

4. Study Guide: Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 11, Abortion (Part 2)

Study Guide: Ethics of Abortion - Pro-Life Arguments

Quiz

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. According to Don Marquis, what is the primary reason why killing is wrong when it is wrong?
2. How does Marquis' argument about the wrongfulness of killing relate to the moral permissibility of contraception?
3. What is Alexander Proust's central argument regarding the moral status of a fetus?
4. Explain Proust's response to the "twinning objection" concerning his argument.
5. According to Frank Beckwith, what is misleading about the statistic that abortion is safer than childbirth?
6. What is Beckwith's main criticism of Judith Jarvis Thompson's violinist analogy in the context of abortion?
7. How does Psalm 139:13-16 contribute to a biblical pro-life argument?
8. Explain the significance of the Hebrew phrase *yetzu yeladeha* in Exodus 21 for the abortion debate.
9. What is the common logical fallacy that Scott Rae argues is present in many common pro-choice arguments?
10. Provide one example of a common pro-choice argument and explain how Rae believes it commits this fallacy.

Quiz Answer Key

1. Marquis argues that killing is wrong, when it is wrong, because it deprives the victim of a valuable future, including all the experiences, activities, projects, and enjoyments they would have otherwise had. This loss of a potential future is considered one of the greatest possible losses.

2. Marquis' argument allows for the moral permissibility of contraception because, in contraception, there is no individual entity that is deprived of a valuable future. Neither a single sperm nor a single ovum has a valuable future on its own, and a specific combination hasn't yet occurred.
3. Proust's central argument is that since each adult was once a fetus, and it is wrong to kill an adult, then it would have been equally wrong to kill that same organism when it was a fetus. He asserts that the fetus and the adult are the same continuous organism and thus deserve the same respect.
4. Proust addresses the twinning objection (where a single blastocyst splits into twins) by arguing that the mere possibility of an organism splitting in the future does not negate its status as a genuine individual organism before the split occurs. The potential for division doesn't change the present reality of a single organism with a valuable future.
5. Beckwith argues that the statistic claiming abortion is nine times safer than childbirth is misleading because the absolute difference in maternal mortality rates is statistically insignificant. While the ratio seems large, the actual survival rates for both procedures are extremely high (99.999% for abortion and 99.991% for childbirth), with a negligible difference of 0.008%.
6. Beckwith criticizes Thompson's violinist analogy by pointing out a key disanalogy: the unborn child is naturally dependent on the mother, whereas the violinist's dependence is artificially created. He argues that comparing an artificially connected stranger to one's own naturally dependent offspring undermines the inherent obligations a mother has towards her child.
7. Psalm 139:13-16 contributes to a biblical pro-life argument by highlighting God's intimate involvement in the creation of the unborn within the mother's womb. The psalmist describes God as actively "knitting" and "weaving" the individual, suggesting that the unborn have significance and are known by God from their earliest stages.
8. The Hebrew phrase *yetzu yeladeha*, meaning "her child comes out," in Exodus 21 is crucial because its proper translation impacts the passage's stance on the value of the unborn. If translated as premature birth, harm to the child could result in a "life for life" penalty, supporting a pro-life view. However, if mistranslated as miscarriage, it could be interpreted as valuing the fetus less than the mother.

9. Scott Rae argues that many common pro-choice arguments commit the fallacy of begging the question, which is assuming the conclusion in the premise. These arguments often assume that the fetus is not a person with moral rights without providing justification for that assumption.
10. A common pro-choice argument is that a woman has the right to do with her own body as she chooses. Rae argues this begs the question because it assumes the fetus is merely a part of the woman's body and lacks independent moral rights. If the fetus is considered a separate human person, then the woman's right to bodily autonomy does not automatically extend to ending that person's life.

Essay Format Questions

1. Compare and contrast the philosophical arguments for the pro-life position presented by Don Marquis and Alexander Proust. In what ways are their approaches similar, and where do they diverge?
2. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of Don Marquis' "valuable future" argument against abortion. Consider potential objections and how Marquis might respond to them.
3. Evaluate Alexander Proust's argument that "I once was a fetus" as a basis for the moral wrongness of abortion. What are the most compelling aspects of this argument, and what are the most significant challenges it faces?
4. Discuss Frank Beckwith's critiques of common pro-choice arguments, specifically focusing on his response to the "safer than childbirth" statistic and Judith Jarvis Thompson's violinist analogy. How effective are his counterarguments?
5. Explore the biblical arguments often used to support the pro-life position. How do passages like Psalm 139 and Exodus 21 contribute to this perspective, and what are some potential interpretations or counterarguments to these biblical claims?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Prima Facie Wrong:** A moral obligation or wrong that holds initially but can be overridden by stronger moral considerations.
- **Fetal Personhood:** The belief or stance that a fetus has the moral status and rights of a person.
- **Voluntarism (in ethics):** The view that moral obligations arise primarily from voluntary consent or choice.
- **Disanalogy:** A point of difference between two things being compared, which can weaken the validity of an analogy.
- **Fallacy of Begging the Question (Circular Reasoning):** A logical fallacy where the premise of an argument assumes the truth of the conclusion.
- **Euthanasia:** The practice of intentionally ending a life to relieve pain and suffering.
- **Physician-Assisted Suicide:** The provision of means (such as medication) by a physician to a patient to end their own life.
- **Contraception:** Methods used to prevent pregnancy.
- **Blastocyst:** An early stage of embryonic development, occurring a few days after fertilization.
- **Autonomy:** The capacity to make one's own decisions and act on them freely.
- **Trajectory Argument:** An argument, like Proust's, that emphasizes the continuous development of an individual from conception to adulthood.

5. FAQs on Spiegel, Christian Ethics, Session 11, Abortion (Part 2), Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on Pro-Life Arguments Regarding Abortion

1. What is Don Marquis' central argument regarding the wrongfulness of killing, and how does it relate to abortion? Don Marquis argues that what makes killing wrong, when it is wrong, is that it deprives the victim of a valuable future, encompassing all the experiences, activities, projects, and enjoyments they would have otherwise had. Applying this to the abortion debate, Marquis contends that aborting a fetus deprives it of a potentially valuable future, thus making abortion a *prima facie* serious wrong, even without addressing the question of fetal personhood.

2. How does Marquis' argument address the issue of contraception? Marquis' view allows for the moral permissibility of contraception because, in the case of contraception, there is no existing individual who is deprived of a valuable future. Neither individual sperm cells nor individual ova have a valuable future on their own, and a specific combination of sperm and ovum that could have had a future does not yet exist at the point of contraception.

3. What is Alexander Proust's main argument concerning abortion? Alexander Proust's argument centers on the idea that every individual was once a fetus. He posits that if it is wrong to kill a person now, then it would have been wrong to kill that same organism when it was a fetus. Because we are the same continuous organism from our fetal stage to adulthood, a fetus deserves the same respect as an adult, and therefore, it is wrong to kill a fetus whenever it would be wrong to kill an adult in similar circumstances.

4. How does Proust respond to the "twinning objection" against his argument? The twinning objection raises the point that a single blastocyst can split into twins, suggesting a challenge to the idea of a single individual with a continuous valuable future. Proust addresses this by stating that the mere possibility of an organism splitting in the future (which he notes is relatively rare) does not negate its status as a genuine individual organism prior to the split.

5. According to Frank Beckwith, what is misleading about the argument that abortion is safer than childbirth? Frank Beckwith argues that while it is often claimed that first-trimester abortion has a lower mortality rate for the woman compared to childbirth, this comparison is statistically misleading. He points out that the actual difference in survival rates (99.999% for abortion vs. 99.991% for childbirth) results in a negligible difference of 0.008%. Therefore, building a pro-choice argument on this supposed safety difference is problematic.

6. How does Beckwith critique Judith Jarvis Thomson's violinist analogy in the context of abortion? Beckwith critiques Thompson's violinist analogy on several grounds. He argues that Thompson's analogy assumes that all obligations to one's offspring must be voluntary, which Beckwith contends undermines the natural, non-voluntary obligations inherent in family morality. Furthermore, he highlights a key disanalogy: the unborn child is naturally dependent on the mother, unlike the artificially created dependence of the violinist on the unwilling host. This artificial connection fails to account for the natural bond between a mother and her child.

7. What are some biblical arguments presented in favor of the pro-life view? Several biblical passages are cited to support the pro-life view. Psalm 139:13-16 highlights God's intimate creation and knowledge of the unborn. Jeremiah 1:5 indicates God's knowledge and plans for individuals even before birth. Luke 1:41-44 refers to the unborn John the Baptist as a "baby" who "leaped" in the womb. Exodus 21:22-25, depending on the translation, can be interpreted as assigning a significant value to the unborn, with penalties for causing harm. Additionally, numerous passages (e.g., Galatians 1:15, Isaiah 49:1, Judges 13:5, Genesis 25:23) show God calling individuals before their birth.

8. What is the common fallacy that Scott Rae argues is present in many common pro-choice arguments? Scott Rae argues that many common pro-choice arguments, such as "a woman has the right to do with her own body as she chooses," the fear of "back-alley abortions," concerns about financial hardship, and the idea of not forcing women to have unwanted or handicapped children, all commit the fallacy of begging the question. This is because these arguments implicitly assume that the fetus is not a person and has no moral rights. If the fetus is considered a person with rights, then these considerations become irrelevant as they do not override the rights of another human being.