



# Human Plus

Update from Jacob Burow - December 2013

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If we are all so different from one another, then what is it that we all have the same about us that demands we be treated the same, at least when it comes to the basic right to life? Most people get it. They answer right away: “We’re all human.” They realize that our equal rights aren’t based on the kinds of things we can do, but on the kind of thing that we are: human. Since the unborn are also human, that means they must have the same right to life that other humans have.

Sometimes, though, abortion advocates create a modified version of this view which will allow them to maintain their pro-choice stance. They will claim that being human isn’t enough. Instead, one must be human *plus* some other quality. I call these responses *Human Plus Arguments*.

I talked with a young man at Wichita State University who formed a Human Plus Argument. I knew it was ad hoc, but I could not get that across to him. By *ad hoc*, I meant adding extraneous premises, or premises for which there is no independent reason to believe them, to a theory in order to save it from being falsified. When I said that it seemed ad hoc, he insisted that “human plus another quality” did not actually include an added premise or criterion — it was simply a new “single” criterion. I left campus frustrated with myself that I was unable to get through to him. As I drove home, I reflected on the conversation and on discussions that I had had with other Justice For All staff members. It finally clicked in my mind how I might explain that the Human Plus Argument is ad hoc.

A week later in Georgia, the situation came up again, but this time I was ready. Brandon, a University of Georgia student, and I had talked at length over a two-day period about abortion and equal rights. Toward the end of the conversation on the second day, we were deeply involved in testing different explanations for why we should have an equal right to life. Brandon had been arguing that *independence* is what grounded our right to life and that since the unborn are

not independent, then abortion should be legal. When I pointed out that many animals are independent, Brandon made the natural move to add humanness to his criterion for receiving the right to life. Brandon was now claiming that being human *plus* independent was what mattered.

So I asked Brandon, “Can we agree that if we are talking about the right to life for adult humans only, then being human would be an adequate reason for treating them equally?” Brandon agreed.

I continued, “Can we also agree that being independent is an inadequate reason for treating adults equally because it would include animals?” Again, he agreed.

“It seems that if we are trying to explain equality for adults, then adding an explanation to an already adequate explanation is unnecessary — that is, unless you are just trying to add an extra criterion to justify abortion. Doesn’t that mean the argument is ad hoc?”

Brandon thought about that for several seconds. “You are right,” he admitted. “It is an ad hoc argument. I guess there is not a good argument for abortion.”

I think the key to helping people understand the ad hoc nature of Human Plus Arguments is demonstrating that the person is simply complicating his argument in an effort to save it from being falsified. Sometimes it is the desire to justify abortion that drives a person beyond the simplest explanation of our equality to creating a Human Plus Argument that will exclude the right to life for the unborn. If humanness is a good explanation of our equality, then there is no need to add another criterion to it — especially if the thing being added is insufficient in and of itself.

Thank you all for your support of me in this work!

God bless,

*Jacob Burow*

