

# “How Can You Claim that Abortion Is Genocide?”

*Does legalized abortion rank with the worst atrocities in history?*

Stephen Wagner

## ***The Challenge of the Genocide Comparison***

When we compare abortion to other acts of genocide, we set ourselves up for two challenges. First, many more people will stop and talk to us than would otherwise because the claim that abortion is genocide is so provocative. And many of these students will be very angry, so we will have to walk carefully to keep the conversation productive. Second, most people have very shallow definitions of problems like genocide. Once again, we become teachers, walking students through a process of discovery of the truth. Our tools? Questions. Our strength? The facts are clear.

## ***An Argument that Shows Abortion is Genocide***

- (1) Genocide is a “systematic destruction of a people group.”
  - (2) Abortion is systematic (it is government-sanctioned killing).
  - (3) Abortion is destructive (abortion photos illustrate this).
  - (4) Abortion singles out a people group (unwanted unborn humans).
- Therefore... (5) Abortion is an act of genocide.

## ***Ask a Question***

- “Why do you believe abortion isn’t genocide?”

## ***Objection 1: “Genocide has to do with race, not unwantedness.”***

- “Why were people killed in the Cambodian Genocide?” (They resisted Pol Pot’s regime, lived in or near cities, and most were educated.)
- The definition of genocide is constantly evolving; we follow the commonly used summary of the 1948 UN resolution (see reverse); see also the definitions of various genocide scholars (see reverse).
- “I’ll grant that this exhibit expands on the UN definition (which was constructed to avert another Holocaust), but wouldn’t you agree that killing acts since the Holocaust have forced us to go beyond the racial dynamic into people groups that are targeted for other reasons – that they have something the powerful want or because they are in their way?”

## ***Objection 2: “The unborn isn’t a human being”***

- Use the “10-Second Pro-Life Apologist” and describe the scientific evidence.
- “What do you think it is if it’s not a human being?” (Corinne Cords, MN)

## ***Objection 3: “Abortion isn’t systematic” (no government involvement, individual women)***

- I agree that an individual abortion or a photo of an individual baby killed by abortion cannot be called genocide. I’m glad you made the point. People often misunderstand our genocide comparison. We’re not saying that individual women are genocidal maniacs. We’re focusing on the fact that abortion is legal. If it’s legal, and it kills unwanted

unborn human being, and our society tolerates it, could our society be guilty of genocide? So our question is, “Does the legality of abortion, which results in many deaths, constitute genocide?”

- Would you agree that the laws of this country not only protect the right to dismember the unborn, but the government funds that killing in many cases?
- What does it mean for killing to be systematic?
- If 3700 first-graders were killed in elementary schools every day in America, would you have a hunch that there was probably a systematic element making the killing possible?

### ***Other Questions You Can Ask***

- “Are there any pictures of genocide here? Which ones? Why?”
- “Let’s set aside the question of genocide. Would you at least agree that it’s an act of homicide?”

### ***Definition of “Genocide” in Webster's New World Encyclopedia (1992):***

“The deliberate and systematic destruction of a national, racial, religious, political, cultural, ethnic, or other group defined by the exterminators as undesirable.” (*Webster's NWE*, Prentice Hall General Reference, 1992)

### ***Origin of the Word, “Genocide” (1943):***

Raphael Lemkin coined the term “genocide” originally in 1943, in hopes of capturing in a single word the sheer evil of the Nazi attempts to exterminate the Jewish people. He had been concerned about mass slaughter from the 1920’s, shortly after the mass slaughter of Armenians by the Turks (1917). In 1933, Lemkin presented a paper on creating a sort of international law to prevent mass slaughter from happening again. He was largely ignored in the 1930’s and even in the 1940’s, but in 1951, six years after the end of WWII, the UN finally adopted a resolution condemning genocide.

### ***Original United Nations Definition (1948):***

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

***Adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the United Nations General Assembly on 9 December 1948 (in force 12 January 1951).***

#### Article 2

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

### **Definitions of Genocide from Historians and Social Scientists**

Note: Original source (2005) no longer contains these quotes: [http://www.isg-iags.org/references/def\\_genocide.html](http://www.isg-iags.org/references/def_genocide.html)

The purpose of looking at these scholars' definitions of genocide is two-fold:

- To show that the definition is constantly being refined in order to make sense of new types of mass killing.
- To show that abortion fits these recent definitions. Expanded to include mass killings not associated with race, they speak of groups. Many (if not all) of these scholars believe abortion is not genocide. Our question is simple, "How do 'unwanted unborn humans' not constitute a group under your definition?"

"Genocide is a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator." (Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, *The History and Sociology of Genocide*, 1990)

"Genocide in the generic sense is the mass killing of substantial numbers of human beings, when not in the course of military forces of an avowed enemy, under conditions of the essential defenselessness and helplessness of the victims." (Source: Israel W. Charny's article in *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions* ed. George Andreopoulos, 1994)

"Genocide is sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity directly or indirectly, through interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim." (Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective*, 1993/1990).

"By our definition, genocides and politicides are the promotion and execution of policies by a state or its agents which result in the deaths of a substantial portion of a group. The difference between genocides and politicides is in the characteristics by which members of the group are identified by the state. In genocides the victimized groups are defined primarily in terms of their communal characteristics, i.e., ethnicity, religion or nationality. In politicides the victim groups are defined primarily in terms of their hierarchical position or political opposition to the regime and dominant groups." (Source: Barbara Harff and Ted R. Gurr, "Toward empirical theory of genocides and politicides," *International Studies Quarterly* 37, 3 [1988])

"The concept of genocide applies *only* when there is an actualized intent, however successfully carried out, to physically destroy an *entire* group (as such a group is defined by the perpetrators)." (Source: Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, Vol. 1, 1994).

### **FURTHER STUDY:**

Gregg Cunningham, *Why Abortion is Genocide*, [www.abortionno.org/pdf/whyabortionisgenocide.pdf](http://www.abortionno.org/pdf/whyabortionisgenocide.pdf)

## Activity 22: From “Not Genocide” to “Not Human”

*Is abortion genocide? It depends in part on the question, “What is the unborn?”*

Trent Horn

*Note: For “Analyze,” see “How Can You Claim that Abortion Is Genocide?” by Stephen Wagner.*

### **IMITATE**

*Pro-Choice:* How can you say that abortion is genocide? That’s so offensive!

*Pro-Life:* Why is it offensive?

*C:* Because you’re using tragedy to promote your political agenda!

*L:* I agree with you that it is insensitive to compare the genocide of humans to the killing of non-humans. That’s why I don’t like it when animal rights groups compare the holocaust to the slaughter of cows. But can you give me a reason to think these human fetuses aren’t human beings?

*C:* That’s not the issue. Genocide involves targeting people because you hate their race or nationality. Women don’t hate their fetuses and fetuses don’t have a race or culture that is being targeted for elimination!

*L:* Well, if you look at the statistics for how many African-American children are aborted versus white children, you might be surprised. But let’s grant your point. I never said genocide involved hatred or the targeting of a race or nationality. I believe it is the systematic killing of a people group.

*C:* Abortion isn’t systematic. The government doesn’t make anyone have an abortion.

*L:* Well, would you think the Nazi Holocaust would have been just as wrong, or maybe worse, if the government merely made it legal for ordinary citizens to kill Jews and other undesirables instead of the government doing the killing themselves?

*C:* But those were real people.

*L:* I agree, but you haven’t given me a reason to think the unborn aren’t real people.

*C:* Jews in the Holocaust could suffer, fetuses can’t.

*L:* What if we painlessly euthanized thousands of infants every year, would you think that qualified as genocide?

*C:* No, because it has to be a racial or national group. Look, I don’t disagree that a fetus is a life. But I hate when you people incorrectly call things genocide that aren’t genocide.

*L:* I’m curious. You seem more upset by our mislabeling of genocide, than by the killing of all these unborn humans. Shouldn’t we be more worried about saving babies from abortion than splitting hairs over the semantics involved in that killing?

C: They're not babies!

## **IMPROVISE**

*Pro-Life:* Why don't you think abortion is genocide?

*Pro-Choice:* Genocide is a hateful thing the Nazis did. Are you saying women who have abortions are like the Nazis?

L: ???

## **Activity 23: Is Genocide about Individuals or Society?**

*Clarifying the Abortion-Genocide Comparison by Focusing on Legality*

Stephen Wagner

*Note: For "Analyze," see "How Can You Claim that Abortion Is Genocide?" by Stephen Wagner.*

## **IMITATE**

*Pro-Choice:* Abortion is genocide? You're calling women Hitler.

*Pro-Life:* I think you may have misunderstood the comparison here. Help me understand how you got from there to here.

C: You're comparing abortion to genocide. If abortion is like genocide, then those who participate in abortion are like the Nazis who killed millions of people.

L: Would you agree with me that the genocide comparison makes no sense if abortion doesn't kill an innocent human being?

C: Yes. And that's another reason the comparison makes no sense. The unborn isn't even in the world yet.

L: Okay. So it looks like you have two concerns about the genocide comparison. First, you think women shouldn't be compared to Hitler, and second, you think the unborn isn't a human being.

C: That's right.

L: Which of these concerns is more important to you?

C: Women shouldn't be compared to Hitler.

L: Okay. Let me give you my thoughts on that, and then I'd like to hear what you think. Let's just grant for the sake of the argument that the unborn are human beings with the same right to life that you and I have.

C: That's unfair. You're biasing the argument.

L: That wasn't my intention. You'll see where I'm going with this in a few moments.

C: Okay. Let's grant that the unborn are human beings. Proceed.

L: If the unborn is a human being, then abortion kills a human being. And if abortion is legal, and in America we kill more than 3,500 humans each day because of it, could our society be like the Nazi society, since we're allowing mass homicide to occur just like the Nazi society did?

C: Well, if abortion did kill humans, I guess we would be killing a lot of humans. What was that that you said about "society"?

L: I asked, essentially, "Is our society similar to these other societies that also allowed the killing of a lot of humans?"

C: I guess it would be. But women are part of the society. You're blaming them for mass homicide.

L: We're actually attempting to focus squarely on the legality of abortion, the system that makes it so prevalent. We're not making any claims about the women who have abortions. It's quite understandable that since abortion is legal, women get abortions.

C: So if I hear you correctly, you're focusing on the society that allows abortion and not on the individuals who make the choice of abortion.

L: Well, I'm not saying those women have no culpability. I just wouldn't call them genocidal maniacs. I can't claim to know them or be able to judge their motives or personal stories.

C: That's a relief. At least you're not insane. But this whole discussion has been based on the idea that the unborn is a human being. It's not. It's so much different from you and me.

L: You're right that the unborn is different from an adult in some ways. I'm wondering, though, what differences you're thinking of...

## **IMPROVISE**

*Pro-Choice:* Abortion is genocide? You're calling women Hitler.

L: ???

## Activity 24: Is Genocide about Race?

*Focus on evolving definitions to clarify the similarity between abortion and genocide.*

Stephen Wagner

*Note: For “Analyze,” see “How Can You Claim that Abortion Is Genocide?” by Stephen Wagner.*

### **IMITATE**

*Pro-Choice:* Abortion is not genocide.

*Pro-Life:* Help me understand why you believe that abortion isn't genocide.

*C:* Look at the definition by the U.N. in 1948: “In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group...” The unborn don't constitute a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. Therefore, killing the unborn isn't genocide.

*L:* Would you say that the unborn constitutes a group of humans at all?

*C:* No.

*L:* So, it sounds like there are really two reasons you think legal abortion is not genocide.

*C:* Well, sure. The unborn aren't humans, and even if they were, killing them wouldn't be genocide.

*L:* Even if we kill 1.2 million of them every year?

*C:* What are you talking about?

*L:* That's how many abortions happen each year in the U.S. alone. If you include the whole world, it's more like 42 million.

*C:* That's a lot. I don't like abortion.

*L:* I'm curious: why do you have negative thoughts about it?

*C:* Well, it's killing a potential life.

*L:* Do you mean that it's killing what potentially will become a human being once it has some time to develop, so it seems like a shame that so many unborn children are being killed?

*C:* I wouldn't call them children, but yes. It's a shame.

*L:* I agree that it's a shame, but my view is that it's a shame because the unborn are actually human beings now.

*C:* No matter what, though, abortion isn't genocide.

*L:* You mean, even if the unborn are human beings, they wouldn't fit the U.N. definition?

C: Yes.

L: Have you seen the movie, “The Killing Fields”?

C: Yes. I saw it in my “Film and Human Rights” class.

L: That class sounds interesting! Well, you remember then that Pol Pot killed off something like one quarter of his population? Do you know why he killed them?

C: He wanted to return Cambodia to a farm-based society.

L: Do you remember that he killed people who were located near cities or had glasses?

C: Yes. He killed them primarily because they were educated in the tradition of the West and were getting in the way of his agenda.

L: So, would you say that Pol Pot and his regime committed a genocide against the Cambodian people?

C: Yes, but see, it was racial!

L: What race of people was being targeted? Is “being a citizen of Cambodia” a “race”?

C: What’s your point?

L: It seems to me that the Cambodian situation forces us to adjust our definition of the word “genocide.” The Cambodian “Killing Fields” situation qualifies as a mass homicide, at least, but it doesn’t seem that there is much of a difference between the mass homicide of Cambodia and the “genocide” of Nazi Germany. Both featured regimes intent on getting rid of people who were in the way of what they believed was “progress.”

C: I see your point.

L: Could we agree, then, that “systematic destruction of a people group” is a good definition that captures the core of what we mean by “genocide”?

C: Sure, but I still don’t think the unborn qualify as a group of humans someone is trying to remove because they are in the way of progress.

L: What about “unwanted unborn humans”?

C: I don’t think that’s a definable group.

L: Okay, if we can’t agree that abortion is “genocide,” consider just one unborn embryo. Can we at least agree that an individual abortion should be considered some sort of homicide?

C: No. The unborn aren’t human.

L: So, that leads us full circle. When you say, “not human,” do you mean “not human biologically” or “not human in terms of intrinsic value and the right to life”?