

## Just a Minute...

*Can you make the pro-life case in 60 seconds?*

Stephen Wagner

A few years back, I had a conversation with a pro-choice activist at Colorado State University (CSU). After she repeatedly talked over my questions, assuming she knew what I thought, I said, “You haven’t even given me a chance to make my case. Can I have even one minute to tell you why I am pro-life?”

I got what I asked for. In fact, a crowd had formed and her friend set her watch and instructed me to begin. I was being timed.

Would you know what to say if you were in my shoes? Every day you have similar opportunities even if they are not as contentious as my campus debate. You can make a great impact if you think about what you might say beforehand. In my case, I had about three seconds to decide which tools I would include as I began my response. You have this next five minutes to think it through.

Test Yourself. Take just a minute or so and write down what you would say if the same challenge were posed to you: Why are you pro-life? Why should anyone agree with you? (*Hint: If you want a pro-choice advocate to change her mind, you’ll have to give more than subjective autobiography. To persuade, you’ll have to share objective reasons.*)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

To find out how I made my case to the pro-choice advocate at CSU, see the reverse. →

The stopwatch was set. I felt the weight of the lives of the unborn in the balance as the crowd fixed their eyes on me. Here's essentially what I said:<sup>11</sup>

*If the unborn is growing, it must be alive. And if it has human parents, it must be human. And living humans, or human beings like you and me, are valuable, aren't they? From fertilization, all that's added to the unborn is a proper environment and adequate nutrition. So if you are an organism now, you must have been an organism from the time of fertilization. And not only that. There's one thing all of us have equally that demands equal treatment: we all have a human nature. Racism and sexism are wrong because they pick out external differences and ignore the underlying similarity between men and women, blacks and whites. And my concern is for your rights as a woman, that you can vindicate them against the will of the majority, but you can only vindicate your rights if you base them on your human nature. But the unborn also has that same human nature, so shouldn't we protect him from discrimination just like we protect minorities and women?*

I remember sharing a version of this argument with a young woman named Lynette at the University of Texas in 2005. Her response: "That's the best argument I've heard for the pro-life position. If I were pregnant, that's the argument I'd have to grapple with." (Lynette and I went on to correspond by email. A note she wrote about our conversation became the final section of my book, *Common Ground Without Compromise*.)

Notice why the argument is so powerful: First, it shows that the unborn is a living, whole organism of the human species. Then, it shows that if we oppose racism and sexism (which almost everyone does), then the reason we oppose them must be due to the underlying similarity we all share: our human nature. It's our common human nature that demands equal treatment. The argument then points to the unborn as another being with that same human nature and asks this question: Don't the unborn deserve our best efforts to protect them?

## **OUTLINE OF THE ONE-MINUTE PRO-LIFE APOLOGIST**

1. If the unborn is *living* and *human*.
2. To be more precise, the unborn from fertilization is a living, human *organism*.
3. There is one thing we have equally that demands equal treatment: *human nature*
4. To vindicate women's rights we must base our case on human nature.
5. If unborn has that same human nature, then we should protect the unborn just like we protect women.

---

<sup>11</sup> I owe this approach to framing the issue ("equals should be treated equally, so if we believe in equal treatment, then there must be something the same about us") to J.P. Moreland. See [www.jpmoreland.com](http://www.jpmoreland.com) for more on Dr. Moreland.