

I cannot offer a deeper condemnation of this bill, for reason of its philosophical implications to the value of human life.

Much of the debate on this topic has been centred on women's rights. These are not to be ignored, but I believe when we focus only on the needs and desires of the pregnant mother, we ignore the most important issue. That is, the issue of what it means to end the life of an unborn child. If we cannot establish beyond any reasonable doubt that the life of an unborn child lacks inherent value, that it has no rights of its own and may be disposed of whenever it is convenient to do so, then discussion of women's choices remains a mere distraction.

Allow me to present the very simplest form of the pro-life argument.

Definition: Murder is the intentional killing of an innocent human.

Premise 1: The human fetus is an innocent human.

Conclusion 1: To intentionally kill a human fetus is murder.

Premise 2: Murder (as defined) is morally wrong (i.e. people *ought* not murder).

Conclusion 2: Killing a human fetus, being murder, is morally wrong.

There can be no doubt as to this being perfectly valid, logically. All conclusions follow naturally and necessarily from the premises. The disagreement must therefore be with the truth of the premises.

Many attempt to take issue with Premise 1. Innocence cannot be doubted. The child cannot have done anything to 'deserve' death. Its humanness, and personhood is therefore the issue. Biologically, there is no question. At the moment of fertilisation, a new organism, biologically distinct from its mother, is brought into existence, and that organism is a juvenile example of its parents' species. After this, the process is entirely continuous, ending only with death. There is no point, biologically, at which humanness is bestowed upon the child. That is its very nature. A human is what it is. Lines in the sand, like 12 or 24 weeks, or birth, are wholly arbitrary when it comes to this question. If we want 'human' and 'murder' to mean something really important (and matters of right and wrong are the most important) we mustn't be arbitrary. I think all can agree that when some few deny personhood to a category of human, atrocities are bound to follow. Let history be our lesson as to that. So let us not impose artificial divisions on nature and treat them as authoritative on such crucial matters as right and wrong, and life and death. And I would note this as especially true for such divisions that so many rational people will not accept, and to which so many natural human feelings are opposed.

So let's turn our attentions to Premise 2. Is murder, as I defined it (as per tradition), always wrong? Is it ever permissible? This hinges on the issue of *value*, as it pertains to human life. In many of our largest and oldest religious traditions, human life is considered something sacred, set apart from the life of plants and animals, and endowed with certain moral duties and protections. The modern secular world struggles to put much weight on these sentiments, citing freedoms and rights and 'the greater good' to counteract what is considered mere superstition. Some will point to scientific realities. Of course, the fetus is only a collection of cells, they say. What they do not mention is that, as far as science can tell us, an adult human is only a larger collection of cells, with some increased functionality and independence. Such reductionism, when taken to its logical extreme, shows itself to be a mere absurdity. Aren't we all just atoms? Differing from cats, and trees and the chairs we sit on, by differences of mere composition and arrangement? My point is that the physical world, taken without human ideas of value, cannot be a guide to us on moral issues. You cannot dismiss all our traditions and sentiments as mere superstition for the sake of any cause, for the simple reason that such things are *all* we have to make moral judgements. Without them, we must abandon all ideas of justice and decency, and give ourselves up to complete moral anarchy.

Reasonable human tradition and sentiment tells us that killing innocents is wrong, for any reason. What's more, natural human feeling tells us there is something particularly precious about an

infant, pre- and post-birth. Ask any ordinary couple, seeing their newborn ~~With their own eyes for the first time.~~ What an extraordinary, precious, awesome, miraculous thing! Would mother or father not give anything for their child? Would they not say their child is beyond value? Worth more than anything? Any other response would be widely regarded as a deficiency. And behaving as though anything other than these feelings were true is near-universally regarded as depravity. You will hear the same sentiments from parents who see their unborn child in a ultrasound, or those who fret over a unborn child's health, or by parents grieving over a miscarriage. But this bill proposes to tell these people that their feelings are meaningless, and in fact seeks to legislate that they are simply *wrong*. For if they were right, the bill must be rejected as a moral monstrosity. As far as I can tell, this bill will allow the murder of an unwanted child right up to birth, for any reason. What it tells us, as citizens, is that the life of a child means nothing. Every natural sense of duty and love towards the unborn child are reduced to mere biological phenomena, with no basis in reality beyond our own selves. Consider what this means! If we can deny the value of the unborn on this basis, what else in our law and culture can then be thrown out?

Nearly everything we believe, from our condemnation of rapists, thieves and domestic abusers, to our sense of charity, and kindness and fairness, is all built upon the idea that the human is a valuable, important thing. This is the very foundation of a decent, civilised society. This is why we must insist on Premise 2! But this bill takes as its most fundamental assumption that it isn't true at all. Its implication is that human life can be disposed of, whenever we see fit. Sure, it makes the arbitrary distinction between pre-birth life and post-birth life. But arbitrary lines in the sand can be redrawn, and I would urge all thinking people to consider what further atrocities this kind of thinking can lead us to. I oppose this bill not only because I value human life in any form, and refuse to deny the particular preciousness of the human child, but also because it ultimately threatens us all. If we continue with this sort of thinking, my friends, family, fellow Queenslanders and our descendants are put at risk from present and future lawmakers. I call upon all thinking people to cease to walk down this path of self-destruction, and return to the plane of reason and decency.

I have made myself clear that I adamantly oppose abortion in general, but the callous, indiscriminate nature of this bill I will admit evokes a particular revulsion. A rational, informed society would legislate for true abortion reform rather than call into question the very foundation of human moral reasoning, and completely undermine the value system that gives us freedom and safety. True abortion reform would mean its abolition, with the possible exception of the case in which *both* mother and child are unlikely to survive if the pregnancy proceeds - if we must have deaths, one is better than two.

For now, I would recommend we do not pass this bill, leaving in place what protections for life are already in existence. I would also like to see stronger laws ensuring the protection the individual consciences of health providers. They should be able to refuse to provide abortions or abortion medication, and not be compelled to be indirectly responsible for an abortion through referring the patient to a provider who will. I would also strongly recommend an investment in counselling for women considering terminating their pregnancies, so that they at the very least have a full understanding of what exactly an abortion would involve (and can make a fully informed decision) and give full consideration of other options available to her. In cases where the reasons for wanting an abortion are mental health related, the mother ought to be given full psychological care to support her through her difficulties, and give birth to her child with minimal distress. There also ought to be support services to aid in those with extreme financial or social difficulties, providing them with resources and safety so that they can take their children to full term. Giving children that cannot be cared for up for adoption must be discussed as a viable, and humane option. Life is worth every investment we can spare.

Joshua Arthur

Science undergraduate (Physics major) at the Queensland University of Technology