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Yes, There Are Pro-Life Atheists Out There.

Here’s Why I’m One of Them

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*There was a time when the lines seemed clearer and the slogans said everything. Pro-lifers were Jesus-loving Pope-followers with a passion for sticking rosaries on ovaries, and atheists were quick to respond with “Keep your theology off my biology!”*

*But then lines began to blur. Atheist and civil libertarian journalist Nat Hentoff said that “Being without theology isn’t the slightest hindrance to being pro-life.” Atheist philosophy professor Don Marquis declared abortion is “immoral” because it denies developing fetuses “a future like ours.” The host of CFI’s Point of Inquiry, Robert M. Price, author of books like Jesus is Dead and The Case Against the Case for Christ, called abortion “second-degree murder” on one of his podcasts.*

Kristine, thanks for all the Appeals to Authority. Is that all you have, or do you have any arguments of your own?

*Well, at least we still have the “Four Horsemen” safely in our ranks, right? Not quite. Even our beloved Christopher Hitchens considered “the occupant of the womb as a candidate member of society.” He also argued that “the unborn entity has a right on its side” and identified himself as involved with the pro-life movement.*

Well Kristine, the Supreme Court didn't see it his way, and they are the ones who are tasked to determine legality in America ... not Christopher Hitchens.

*What the heck are we atheists supposed to do with all our “Keep your rosaries…” stickers now?*

*Sorry, Virginia, there really are pro-life atheists. American Atheists President David Silverman wasn’t wrong when he told a reporter at CPAC this week, “I will admit there is a secular argument against abortion” (even if he didn’t agree with that position himself).*

Kristine that's quite a lineup of authorities you've amassed. So I guess there's no need for you to offer any actual evidence at this point, is there?

*When I partnered with fellow atheists from Secular Pro-Life to bring a display table to the 2012 American Atheists Convention, some bloggers really wanted to believe we were lying about our atheism, but it turns out we’re all True Scotsmen. The latest Gallup poll suggests that 19% of those identifying as atheist, agnostic, or of no religious affiliation also identify as pro-life.*

Kristine, 19% of Americans believe Elvis is still in the building.

What exactly do you think that proves, other than that, you are not alone?

*While that number is likely a bit smaller among absolute atheists and freethinkers, my by-atheists-for-atheists organization Pro-Life Humanists is constantly growing, as every week I connect with at least one or two more pro-life atheists from around the world and across social media. Some are still closeted and think they’re the only pro-life person in their local secular community. I am confident most of them are not alone. Our global atheist community is more diverse than we’ve been led to believe, and many pro-life atheists walk among us. Welcome to a new chapter in secularism!*

Kristine, I don't know why this is such a shock to you. There is only one subject that Atheists are guaranteed to agree on; and that, by definition, is religion.

*Many people have a hard time understanding why I might be a pro-life atheist. Here are my responses to some of their more common objections:*

*objection #1*

*"It doesn’t matter whether or not the fetus is a human being, because women have bodily autonomy rights and no human can have non-consensual access to her body."*

*Well not so fast. If the fetus is not a human being with his/her own bodily rights, it’s true that infringing on a woman’s body by placing restrictions on her medical options is always a gross injustice and a violation. On the other hand, if we are talking about two human beings who should each be entitled to their own bodily rights, in the unique situation that is pregnancy, we aren’t justified in following the route of might-makes-right simply because we can. Bigger and older humans don’t necessarily trump younger and more dependent humans. Rights must always be justified and ethically grounded lest they become a tool of tyranny.*

Kristine, so what evidence do you offer that the fetus deserves equal rights as a human being?

*Before we address the question of bodily autonomy in pregnancy, let’s meet the second player. What does science tell us that the preborn are?*

Bad sign, Kristine. You're using dishonest Christian lingo that attempts to rename a fetus by referring to something that will invoke emotion. They usually call it a "child" or a "baby."

You used the word "preborn" which obviously attempts to paint a fetus as a human baby that just hasn't exited the womb quite yet. That picture is not true of first trimester fetuses; nor is that picture scientifically accurate before the fetus becomes viable at the end of the second trimester.

*To be clear, science doesn’t define personhood. It never could.*

Kristine, science doesn't define personhood; the legal system does.

*When I debated Matt Dillahunty on the issue of abortion at the 2012 Texas Freethought Convention, I’m afraid that as a first-time debater I really wasn’t clear enough on this point — and was consequently accused of trying to obtain rights from science. Science can’t tell us whether it’s wrong to rape women, torture children, enslave black people, or which physical traits should or should not matter when it comes to determining personhood.*

Kristine, science *can* inform us about those things you listed. For instance: to determine whether or not it is wrong to torture children, science can perform tests that measure the pain and suffering of those being tortured. That data can then be used as evidence to support the theory that torturing children is wrong.

*Science may be able to measure suffering in living creatures, but it can’t tell us why or if their suffering should matter.*

Kristine, when you say "if their suffering should matter" - my question is: matter to whom?

Do you doubt it matters to the victim? To its relatives and friends?

Studies prove that some animals do have empathy. In humans, empathy is often demonstrated by Liberals. It is even suspected to exist in some Conservatives, though that has yet to be confirmed. Touched a nerve on that one, didn't I Kristine?

Here's some scientific experiments to help you get the picture:

1) Put your finger in a flame and then try your hardest to figure

out ... if it matters.

2) To understand empathy, try this one: take a baby and put its

finger in a flame and then tell me if you've figured out yet ...

if the baby's suffering matters.

You don't seem to have any problem figuring out the answer with "preborns." You believe suffering matters to a clump of cells that has yet to develop a brain or a nervous system, yet you question whether science can answer, whether or not suffering matters for living creatures.

*However, science can tell us who among us belongs to the human species.*

*When it comes to normal human reproduction, sperm and ovum merge to form a new whole.*

Kristine, they merge to form a zygote ... NOT a "new whole."

Kristine, I don't think your problem is a lack of knowledge because I can't believe you could not be aware of basic biology. That only leaves one alternative, Kristine ... deception. Your use of deceptive wording pervades this essay.

*They cease to exist individually and become a new substance that is not the mother and not the father but a new body altogether,*

No Kristine, it doesn't have a body yet; nor a head; nor anything else. It begins as a zygote that, if lucky, will continue to divide.

*one that is also human*

Kristine, your days-old clump of cells has less human cells and DNA, and is therefore less human, than a ball of snot.

*and has the inherent capacity to develop through all stages of development.*

Kristine, not all fetuses are created equal. You seemed to have overlooked the fact that every year, worldwide, 50 million of these fetuses apparently do not have the capacity to develop, and they are eliminated through miscarriage.

*As Christopher Hitchens aptly said:*

*"The original embryonic “blastocyst” may be a clump of 64 to 200 cells that is only five days old. But all of us began our important careers in that form, and every needful encoding for life is already present in the apparently inchoate. We are the first generation to have to confront this as a certain knowledge.  "*

Kristine, Hitchens was an expert in history and politics. But you would fare better in the future if you got your biology information from someone better qualified in the field. Unfortunately, we all know you would never ask someone like P.Z. Myers, who *is* qualified, because he wouldn't give you the answer that you want to hear.

*objection #2*

*"But embryos and fetuses can’t be our equals — they’re not fully developed yet! They aren’t self aware or sentient! They can’t survive on their own! "*

Kristine, I think the reason you used exclamation points after each statement is to make your opponents sound hysterical. People like you, who can't win on the evidence, are forced to resort to tactics like the one you just used. Pathetic and childish.

*Well, of course they can’t. But why isn’t a fetus self-aware or sentient?*

Well Kristine, for one thing, sentience and self-awareness require a functioning brain, and fetuses don't start out with those immediately. They must develop over time.

*Why hasn’t an embryo developed a functioning brain or the capacity to breathe on its own?*

Kristine, missed our biology class did we?

To breathe on its own requires lungs. They don't come stock from the factory either, but like the brain, must develop over time.

*Isn’t it merely because she or he is younger? Isn’t that just the way human beings at their age and stage naturally develop and function? While we wouldn’t give our car keys to toddlers on account of their current capacities, neither would we kill them for not having reached a developmental milestone yet.*

Kristine, actually we do kill fetuses ... millions of times a year.

And developmental milestones do figure into the decision.

*If we deny personhood and justify the death of a fetus simply because he or she has not developed to the point of sentience yet, that makes abortion the deadliest form of age discrimination. When we talk about rights and personhood, we leave the realm of science for that of philosophy and ethics.*

No Kristine, we never leave the realm of science. Philosophy and ethics are guided by science ... not the other way around.

*History is ripe with examples of real biological human beings*

Kristine, not to be a grammar Nazi but the word is "rife":

"History is rife with examples ...."

*whose societies arbitrarily decided they didn’t qualify as equals, on account of criteria deemed morally relevant. At one point (and still, in many ways, today), it was skin color, gender, and ethnic background. Now, we can add to that list consciousness, sentience, and viability.*

Kristine, you have elevated the False Equivalency fallacy to a whole new level.

*We haven’t evolved so fast in 50 years as to be immune from tribalistic us vs. them thinking. If science defines a fetus as a biological member of our species, is it possible that our society is just as wrong in denying them personhood?*

Kristine, laws change over time. Based on future scientific discoveries, abortion law may have to be changed. But based on the evidence we now have, our society and most other advanced nations, permit abortion. It is legally available to 2/3's of the world's women. It is restricted or illegal, mostly in 3rd world countries. So your earlier Appeals to Authority have been trumped by the world's Appeal to Majority.

*Furthermore, if self-awareness is to be the dividing line, anyone unconscious or in a coma might not be considered a person, while those in a heightened state of awareness due to drugs would trump the rest of us.*

Kristine, that was a Straw Man argument because self-awareness is not the dividing line. In fact, there is no dividing line biologically, only legally. And the legal line has nothing to do with self-awareness.

*If we determine that the ability to suffer and feel pain is what counts, then any born person with Congenital Insensitivity to Pain can be stripped of equal rights and killed.*

You know Kristine, up until this point I was trying to give you the benefit of the doubt. But now your arguments are turning into illogical, hysterical nonsense.

Do you have any bullets left in your gun, or have you reached the point where the only thing you can do now, is to throw the damn thing?

*If higher brain function or a greater degree of health are what matter, then anyone with a higher IQ or a greater longevity and health than your own should be free to decide that your unfortunate quality of life makes your existence not worth continuing.*

Kristine, if I have to endure much more of this, I'm going to go back in a time machine and sterilize your father.

*Only the pro-life position — that all human beings should be granted the common right to continue their lives as human persons, regardless of their age, stage, gender, sexual orientation, race, or physical form and abilities — is truly egalitarian and fair for all human beings.*

Kristine ... except for the mother (you kinda left that part out).

*objection #3*

*"But so what? Even if the unborn are human beings worthy of personhood even in their earliest stage of development, under normal circumstances, no one has a right to use someone else’s body against their consent."*

*This is true. And, likewise, under normal circumstances no one should be killed for being too young to care for themselves independently. Unfortunately, pregnancy is completely unlike any normal circumstances or normal human relationship.*

Kristine, earlier you wrote this about pregnancy:

*"When it comes to normal human reproduction, sperm and ovum merge to form a new whole."*

Now you claim that pregnancy is completely unlike

"*any normal circumstances* "

So pregnancy is normal when your argument needs it to be, and is completely unlike any normal circumstances, when your argument needs it to be the other way.

See the inconsistency, Kristine?

*What happens when both a woman and her developing fetus are regarded as human beings entitled to personhood and bodily rights? Any way you cut it, their rights are always going to conflict (at least until womb transfers become a reality). So what’s the reasonable response?*

*It could start by treating both parties at conflict as if they were equal human beings.*

Kristine, slight problem there - they aren't.

*Human society has determined that parents have an obligation to nourish and protect their dependent offspring.*

Kristine, that is not what human society has determined. Human history is ripe, I mean rife, with examples that prove you wrong. If you want to see just how wrong you are, read Steven Pinker's book "The Better Angels Of Our Nature." That book will open your eyes to what human society really determined regarding children.

But Kristine, I wouldn't recommend reading it ... on an empty stomach.

*The more vulnerable and dependent someone is, the more we are obligated to not abandon them.*

Kristine, earlier you said that Science "*can’t tell us why or if their suffering should matter";* and that science *"can’t tell us whether it’s wrong to rape women, torture children ...."*

Kristine, so here's my question: if science can't tell us those things, where do you get the authority to assert "*The more vulnerable and dependent someone is, the more we are obligated to not abandon them.*"

You couldn't have gotten that from science - you said so yourself.

It couldn't have come from God because - you're an Atheist.

So where did it come from?

*That a fetus is singularly dependent on one woman for the duration of nine months is not an argument for abortion, but against it.*

Kristine, why would you even think that a fetus' dependence on its mother could be an argument for abortion?

That doesn't even make sense.

*If an unrelated infant were abandoned on your doorstep miles from civilization with no one in a position to reach you and release you of your charge, would you not be obligated to at least provide basic life-sustaining care until such a time as care could be passed on to another person?*

Kristine, you've taken the term "False Analogy" to a level rarely achieved in modern discourse. Your desperation is evident. Now I see why 'you people' pretty much stick to appeals to emotion and signs with aborted fetuses on them ... it's really all you've got.

*Would this not be true even though you did not consent to the arrival of the dependent human, who was in fact forced upon you? Would you be any less obligated to try to keep this child alive if doing so was wearisome and taxing on your body, though not life-threateningly so? If this is true of one’s duty to sustain a vulnerable and dependent stranger until care can be passed on to another, how much more obligated is a woman to her own prenatal offspring?*

Kristine, once again, you refuse to call it what it is ... a fetus.

Now you call it a "prenatal offspring." You are like a walking thesaurus. You have proven throughout this entire essay that you will go to any lengths to distract people, by using a constant stream of appeals to emotion.

*And there you have an introduction to an abortion debate that is void of Bibles, popes, and rosaries.*

Kristine, you left out "evidence" - an abortion debate void of evidence.

*I realize that this brief secular case against abortion undoubtedly raises as many questions as it has answered.*

Kristine, what case? You presented a bunch of lame analogies and a slew of logical fallacies. Without any evidence, exactly what "case" do you think you made?

*After all, if we make abortion illegal, won’t that make them more dangerous for women?*

Yes Kristine, it would. That's just one reason of many why legalizing abortion was such a great advance for women.

*Do we believe women who have abortions should face jail sentences?*

Kristine, I think "you people" have already decided that it is more cost-effective just to murder the doctors and staff. You didn't like the way democracy worked out, so you resorted to murdering doctors and their staff, and bombing women's health clinics. Now you are circumventing the law in Republican-controlled states and shutting down women's health clinics. Thousands of women who depend on those services will suffer and many will die as a result of the actions of a certain group of Americans who refuse to accept the rule of law when it doesn't go their way.

Sarah Palin was right about death panels. But she forgot to tell everyone that it would be the Republicans who would be operating them.

*Should fetuses be counted in the census, and if so, what happens when a woman miscarries?*

Kristine, that sentence is an excellent example of the silliness you are forced to offer in lieu of evidence. If you had evidence, any evidence, to support your position, you wouldn't have to ask such silly questions.

*Are we trying to put a stop to the work of Planned Parenthood and other women’s clinics?*

Kristine, I can answer that one. Republicans are doing their best to shut down Planned Parenthood; not just abortions but the whole operation. They don't want contraception either.

Strange. Contraception is the greatest weapon against abortion that's ever been developed, and yet Ghost Worshipers don't want it.

That proves beyond a doubt that their concern isn't with the unborn, as they claim, but with their continued religious domination over every aspect of a person's life; especially women. It's all about control.

Nice group of people you've teamed up with, Kristine. Why not just go all in and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?

You would fit in like a glove over there ... and we sure wouldn't miss you.

*To adequately deconstruct these concerns would require lengthy articles unto themselves, which is why I hope this will be the beginning of ongoing dialogue amongst atheists on this matter.*

Kristine, the thought of spending another hour reading your illogical, emotional, fallacy-filled crap makes me seriously consider sending you a how-to video with detailed instructions on how you can, in the privacy of your own home, experiment with ... spontaneous combustion.

*I understand some of the concerns that people have about the pro-life position. Can we grant fetuses rights without endangering and hurting the lives of women? Indeed, no one wants to see women injured or harmed in a dangerous illegal abortion! And therein lies a conversation that a civilized society must have if we are to truly treat every member of our species with equality. Can we legally condone one human being killing another human being because one might otherwise risk her life and health to do so? Or are there better ways to address the problems that drive so many countless women to feel they have no choice but abortion?*

*Frederica Mathewes-Green once said “No woman wants an abortion as she wants an ice cream cone or a Porsche. She wants an abortion as an animal caught in a trap wants to gnaw off its own leg.” Abortion advocates correctly perceive the trap, but they merely offer the woman a sterile knife to aid in the amputation. Real help does not sacrifice one human life at the expense of another but goes to the source of the trap to unscrew the hinge and free both.*

Kristine, you would have been better off skipping all the analogies. You aren't very good at it.

*If we all work together to come up with real choices for women — better birth control,*

Kristine, if there were better birth control methods we would be using them. We are using the best methods we have. So your first idea flops.

*better maternity leave, subsidized daycare, a living wage, flexible work schedules, better schooling options, more attractive open-adoption and temporary foster care options, etc.*

Kristine, you are filling the pool with red herrings. None of those things you listed are relevant to the decision a pregnant women must make about her fetus. All of them assume carrying the fetus to term. Is that your idea of working together to find solutions?

You did nothing but offer solutions that only suit your own position. I hope you never land a job at the United Nations. If you did, I predict the world would be at war within a week.

*That being said, if the pre-born are human members of our species and worthy of recognition as human persons, we have just as much of an obligation to protect them from the choices of other human beings and to ensure that violence against them is not legal and condoned.*

Kristine, but it is legal and condoned. So your premise has not been accepted outside third-world countries and the Republican Party (which is the same difference).

*I’m an atheist and I’m pro-life because some choices are wrong, violent, and unjust — and I want to do whatever I can to make abortion both unthinkable and unnecessary.*

Kristine, seriously, for someone like you ... Jesus is the only answer.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

Bumblebees are Capable of Flying Higher Than Mount Everest

The last thing you’d expect to see out your airplane window is a bumblebee cruising by. But a new study suggests that the insects might be capable of such high-altitude jaunts.

Researchers trapped six male bumblebees living at an altitude of 3,200 meters in China, and placed them, one at a time, in a plexiglass flight chamber. Then they slowly pumped air out of the box, simulating the atmospheric conditions at higher and higher altitudes.

Impressively, only one bee failed to fly above 8,000 meters, and two even remained airborne above 9,000 meters—more than 100 meters higher than the peak of Mount Everest.

So what makes for successful high-altitude flying? The highest flyers didn’t beat their wings any more often than they did at low altitudes; instead, they increase their “stroke amplitude.” That is, they widened their wings’ range of motion, moving them farther back and farther forward during each stroke in order to compensate for the lack of air pressure. Next up? Seeing if female bumblebees, which have smaller wings and, therefore, a shorter range of motion, have the same high-flying potential as their brothers.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

PERRY DEANGELIS (no biography - previously quoted)

"If you strip the horrors of history from history,"

the flip side of that is you strip the nobility

of rising above such horrors."