

'how to argue about abortion' by john noonan essay sample

[Family](#), [Abortion](#)



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The issue of abortion is by far, one of the most controversial topics in American History and everyone seems to have an opinion on the topic. Although there are many sides to the topic, the issue has divided the majority of people to the two extreme views of the topic –Pro-choice Vs. Pro-life. We can see the main arguments of each side just by analyzing the titles given to the two sides. Those who are pro-life believe that they are in fact Pro-Life and that abortion is murder. Those who are pro-choice believe that they are Pro-choice and that outlawing abortion would take the women's freedom to make a choice about her own body. Feelings and emotions about such an issue are very powerful and it has been the case that both sides will go to extremes to defend what they believe in. Such was the case Rosalie and Hector Zevallos, owners of an abortion clinic who were kidnapped and threatened with their lives, if they would not close down their clinic. (Glover, CC, 22)

John Noonan is an abbot supporter of the pro-life movement and in his essay, How to Argue About Abortion, he provides many arguments to support his theory that abortion is nothing but the destruction of a living, breathing human being. Noonan attempts to prove his point by first showing counter arguments to many of the traditional pro-choice themes that have been brought up over and over in support of abortion. He then goes on to mention many arguments that he feels can clearly illustrate the logical reasoning of the pro-life movement.

One of Noonan's first topics to discuss is that of " hard cases" which the pro-choice movement argues are valid reasons as to why abortion should be

available. The main point of this discussion is in the case of Rape. The pro-choice movement argues that a woman is not responsible for a child that was conceived when the woman was raped and therefore can not be held responsible to carry and take care of the child. Noonan argues that, first of all, the whole Rape issue is cited as a racist ploy to suggest that a baby can not be allowed to live when a black man rapes a white woman (Noonan, CC, p12). Noonan suggests that the argument is brought up to play on the racist emotions of many Americans in this country. But to counter the pro-choice's rape argument, Noonan suggests that the mother can not punish the fetus because she was brutalized by another. It is not fair to the fetus that he die, because his mother experiences certain emotions whenever she notices the fetus. The solution to the problem of the mother's emotions as a result of the traumatic experience, is adoption. If the mother can not control the psychological pressures of the child being a constant reminder of the traumatic experience, then the child should be adopted, not die.

Pro-Choice supporters also argue that to abort a child that was conceived as a result of rape, is saving him years of misery of having to live knowing that he was not conceived out of love and that her mother may not care for him/her. Noonan's counter argument is that the child is never consulted to the choice (Noonan, CC, p13). If it is the child's point of view that we are concerned about, then the child should have a say, and Noonan argues that through experience we know that the even seriously incapacitated people would prefer life to death. Noonan's final argument against the Pro-choice "Rape" argument is its danger of being used to generalize the exception.

Meaning that if, for example, abortion was outlawed and only permitted in the case of rape, then those who had casual sex and were now facing an unplanned pregnancy would claim rape in order to abort the child.

One of the central topics discussed by both sides is whether or not, we can say that the fetus is life and therefore can abortion be considered murder. Opponents of the anti abortion movement suggest that abortion of the fetus can not be considered murder because the fetus is not a yet human life. A human being has had many experiences and is self aware and therefore can not be killed whereas the fetus has had no experiences and is not self aware and therefore can be aborted. Noonan argues that experience is not a reliable method to measure life. Yet counter argues this point by saying that the unborn fetus responds to touching of the mothers stomach and also kicks to show it's response. These are all experiences that the baby is experiencing and if it is wrong to kill an experienced human being, then it is wrong to abort a fetus (Noonan, CC, p14). Noonan also argues that psychologically, we humans respond to what we can see and if we can truly see a fetus, we can see life (Noonan, CC, p13).

Another major criticism brought up by the pro-life movement is that men should not be making decision and expressing their opinion about the topic of abortion simply because they are not the ones who experience child birth and having to abort the child. Noonan's response to this argument is that one does not have to be a judge to know that bribery is wrong. (Noonan, CC, p19) This statement implies that we can judge things as morally wrong or right even if we do not experience the situation ourselves. Noonan's also

argues that if those who do not experience the situation can not judge it, then sterile women who can not experience childbirth have no say in the matter as well. (Noonan, CC, p19).

In addition to counter arguing many of the central themes of the Pro-choice supporters, Noonan goes on to display arguments that would support the pro-life movement. Noonan mentions the fact that everyone in the world has one kind of opinion or another for every argument, and that each person has some kind of a logic for their claims (Noonan, CC, p16). Often these claims clash with one another and often the reasoning and logic behind these claims are untrustworthy. Therefore to get at a central answer, we can not just listen to reasoning but instead look within ourselves for a higher answer. Noonan argues that our emotions and tastes are basic and can not be disputed (Noonan, CC, p16). Noonan's central point for bringing up this argument is that we can not just listen to all of the contradicting arguments of the pro-choice movement but instead look within ourselves for a higher answer. If we do this, we will realize that killing is wrong and humanity will not allow us to destroy the child.

To cite examples from history, Noonan mentions that the Romans believed that the fetus is a portion of the mother (Noonan, CC, p20), and therefore preserving it's life was just as important as the mother's. Noonan also mentions that throughout history, artworks and other art forms have celebrated life and it's beauty and not death and the killing of babies.

B) One of the main arguments against Noonan's right to life theory is brought forth in Judith Thomson's essay, A Defense of Abortion. Thomson mentions an artificial case where you (the reader of the article) are kidnapped and plugged into a world famous violinist who depends on blood from your kidneys. This is blood that only you can provide and if you unplug the violinist, he will die. (Thomson, CC, p2) The point that Thomson is trying to make here is that a person has no moral obligations to the violinist and although it would save his life, one can not be expected to put his/her life on hold for long amounts of time, so that the violinist can live.

The moral question being answered here is that even if the pro-life supporters are correct in their theory that abortion is death, it does not mean that the mother is obligated to attach herself to the baby and support it, specially if the baby is unwanted or is conceived through Rape (which is analogous to the fact that boy plugged into the violinist was forcibly kidnapped). Thomson mentions the fact that a mother is pregnant for nine months and asking a person to give up nine months of their life is asking a lot, but it can be done. However, the child must then be supported and raised for 18 years and asking someone to give up 18 years of their life is too much to ask.

Jonathan Glover discusses the topic of the right to life in his essay Matters of Life and Death. Glover argues that anti-abortionists constantly argue that the fetus has a right to life and provide evidence that the baby is in fact alive and has a life. They argue that if we abort the child, it will have missed out on life as we know it. However, Glover argues that although the baby may

have a right to life, the right of a women to control her own life and body is a stronger right. (Glover, CC, p. 30) The mother can not be expected to bear and rear unwanted children, facing physical and psychological stress, all to raise a child without love. The mother's life must be devoted to this child for the 9 months of pregnancy and the 18 or so years of childhood. The mother has a right to life as well and also a right to control her body and she can not be expected to continue supporting something that can lead to her demise.

C) Both Glover and Thomson have valid criticisms of Noonan's essay and in each case, we can see that the mother's rights are discussed. In response to the violinist criticism of Thomson, Glover can and has responded in the following manner. The violinist analogy serves no purpose to the discussion of abortion. (Noonan, CC, p. 12) It is a non real scenario that is completely different from the real life situation of pregnancy. First of all, Jason (the boy kidnapped) was in fact, kidnapped, whereas an unwanted pregnancy is very rarely done by force. Jason was involved in a serious operation which could have endangered his life but a pregnant mother does not have to go through such an operation. Jason's requirement in supporting the violinist was for as long as the violinist wanted to live which may have taken 20-30 years. Pregnancy, on the other hand, last for nine months and an unwanted child can be adopted.

Although Glover does not acknowledge Thomson's argument as a valid one, he does respond to it by stating that as civilized human beings, we are entitled to help our fellow man and if the violinist case was a true one, Jason should remain hooked up to him for as long as it takes.

In response to Glover's argument of the mother's right to live, Noonan states the following. We can look at the argument by looking at it from a biological standpoint. Noonan states that a biological system is in balance when it's main (ie. heart, brain etc.) parts are in balance (Noonan, CC, p16). Other parts can be sacrificed to preserve the whole. This is an analogy to the idea that in the discussion of abortion, all "non important" aspects, such as mother's emotions etc., must be sacrificed for the greater whole, which is the life of the baby.

Noonan would also argue that if it is the case that we are worried about the mother's health and well being, then we should also worry about the effect of abortion on the mother's psychological well being. An abortion, specially a late one, can effect the mother psychologically and if she later feels that she did in fact kill a living human being, she can never correct her mistake. She will live with the mistake for the rest of her life.

I believe that Noonan can effectively respond to criticisms, however, there are some minor flaws in the first argument. Although he is correct in stating that the violinist argument is imaginary and has little relevance, we can see that the situation would have more relevance if we were considering the case of rape, where the women would be forced into the pregnancy, just as Jason was forced to support the violinist.

Although I do not support his argument, I feel that John Noonan, with the exception of some minor flaws, has effectively argued his point as well as his response to the criticisms.