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Point/Counterpoint: The Polemics of Abortion

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Pro-Life Must Also Mean Pro-Woman, Pro-Child

By Mike Cobb

I will attempt to argue in this piece that humanity is not determined by location, independence, appearance, or behavior but rather biological description, and that there is a reasonable argument for when, apart from the physical life of the mother, the child is as deserving of protection as you or I.

The mother's physical life should be paramount in abortion decisions, and all options need to be available to save her life. Would some procedures produce horrible and sad results? Certainly, but are they worse than a mother dying because of a doctor's hesitance about what he can and can't do to save her life? The loss of a child would be sad and tragic, but no more so than the loss of a wife and mother, and no more so than the birth of a child to a grieving home that just lost a parent. While Republicans sending legislation to stop barbaric procedures are commendable, limiting what a doctor can do to save the life of a pregnant mother is wrong.

Some argue that the child is only potentially human. If the baby is something potentially, what is it now, actually? A chair? A dog? A monkey? If the child isn't human, then what is it now and what has to happen for "it" to become human? Is "it" human only when "it" speaks? When "it" votes Republican? Claiming that the pro-life position implies that we shouldn't use condoms since sperm somehow would become human life in the same way that, with time, a fetus would is a bit silly. While it's reasonable that a fertilized egg is the first stage of human life, sperm on its own would never add the extra 23 chromosomes needed to become a new human being.

Is humanity determined by location? Can someone be a human in France but not in America? How about in a tree but not on the ground? (For that matter does it make you a tree if you're in it?) Maybe you're a human in a hospital but not in a home? Are you human in a womb but not outside of a womb? Humanity is biology, not geography.

Is humanity determined by independence? Does being attached to someone or something remove you of your identity? Is a preemie child part of an incubator? Is an oxygen tank human when it helps us breathe? Is my teenager an ipod? Am I a dialysis machine when I'm getting treatment? But, you say, the child's attachment inside the womb is necessary for him to live. The child outside the womb would die as well, and so would the person suffering from emphysema without his oxygen and the kidney patient without her dialysis. Despite their dependence, they're still fully human. Humanity is DNA, not dependence.

Is humanity determined by behavior? Could we kill someone in a coma? It seems as though if humanity is determined by movement, we'd be able to kill those who are in a coma or asleep. Are those in wheelchairs somehow less human since they can't walk? Since a child inside a womb may have more movement than someone who's been paralyzed, does the child inside the womb deserve more protection than one in a wheelchair? Humanity is more composition than motion.

Is humanity determined by appearance? Certainly not. People come in all different shapes and sizes. Some may not have a limb from birth or may have lost a limb but they're still fully human

and fully deserving of all the protections we provide for the rest of humanity. With unique DNA, an independent blood type, unique fingerprints, a beating heart, and brainwaves, the fetus has all the reasonable marks of humanity and we should show the utmost caution before killing him.

The creation of a new human is not always from an act of love. Should a woman be forced to carry a child conceived from rape? I fail to see how arguments related to the infrequency of rapes leading to pregnancy would comfort the one for whom a pregnancy did occur. Given that we cannot use location, appearance, behavior and independence as indicators of the onset of humanity, we need a reasonable stage beyond which abortion should be illegal, excepting the life of the mother. Since we normally use heartbeat and brainwaves as factors to determine when humanity has ended, why not use the same to determine that it has begun? Morning after pills for those who've been assaulted would seem reasonable.

Calling Republicans uncaring when they're pro-life but not pro-free-prenatal care is wrong since keeping a child alive is the first and greatest healthcare procedure. Shouldn't we save our drowning neighbor before offering a meal? Admittedly, doubling the dependent tax credit could help with medical costs, and we could do it without having to create a new government program.

We must protect the life of the mother. We need to comfort the woman who's been assaulted.

We should nurture the child with heartbeat and brainwaves wherever he's located and, apart from the life of the mother, forbid the killing of any other.

Cobb is a resident of Lynchburg.