

# Answers to Anti-Choice Arguments



**Argument:**

*"Abortion is murder."*

**Response:**

1) People who make this statement fail to distinguish between a potential human being and an actual person; they equate a single fertilized egg with a living child. Whether the fertilized ovum, or the pre-embryo, embryo, or fetus (during any of its various developmental stages) has become a "person" is not something that can be scientifically determined. When a new person actually comes into existence is a matter of cultural, spiritual and metaphysical opinion, not scientific fact.

2) Society recognizes the distinction between potential and actual people. In Canada the law is clear: legally, a fetus is not a person until it has been born. This was recently confirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in its decisions in *Daigle* and *Sullivan and LeMay*.

3) Catholic moralists cannot even agree when personhood begins. St. Thomas Aquinas claimed that there is no human being at all during the first few weeks of pregnancy. St. Augustine said, "There cannot yet be said to be a live soul in a body that lacks sensation." For the Church, the question was, and still is, when ensoulment occurs. In 1869, Pope Pius IX officially eliminated the Catholic distinction between an animated and a non-animated fetus. Theologian Joseph Donceel, S.J., states, "There can be no mind before the organism is ready to carry one and no spirit before the mind is capable of receiving it...", (Abortion in a Changing World, Volumes 1 and 2).

**Argument:**

*"Women use abortion as birth control."*

**Response:**

1) If this were the case, women would need at least 2 or 3 abortions per year—30 or more during a lifetime.

2) Studies show that the majority of North American women seeking abortions were using contraception when they became pregnant. Contraceptive devices (especially barrier methods) have significant failure rates.

3) The implication is that women are irresponsible. Should they then be punished for this irresponsible behaviour by being forced to bear a child?

4) The implication is that abortion should be harder to get and then women would always use contraception or perhaps abstain. Again, the intent is to punish. This is a simplistic and inhumane solution to a complex problem.

5) If the anger is directed against the "repeaters", the argument against forced childbirth is the same as in number 3. What about the child born to this "irresponsible" woman? And what about the repeat childbearing among young unmarried women? Is there as much anger directed against them? The issue is not repeat abortions, but repeat unintended pregnancy.

6) There are many societal and psychological barriers to good, effective contraceptive use, and women are not the only ones who neglect to use it or refuse to believe that it could "happen to them".

Statements like “women use abortion as birth control” ignore the role of men in the decision to use contraception. If women are to be punished for non-use of contraception, how shall men be punished?

7) In many parts of the world today abortion is the only method of birth control available to women.

**Argument:**

*“Adoption instead of abortion.”*

**Response:**

1) Those who hold this view are either unaware of, or indifferent to, the trauma of giving up a child for adoption. Giving one’s own child up to another party can cause guilt, anguish, and life-long fantasies concerning the child. In fact, women who have experienced both giving up a child for adoption and having an abortion invariably say that abortion is less traumatic. That is why so many women keep their babies, or have abortions.

2) Since almost one-quarter of abortions are done for married women, this alternative hardly suits them. What married couple gives up a child for adoption except in the most dire circumstances?

3) Women should not be forced to be incubators for women who want babies but who cannot conceive themselves. If some women wish to continue unintended pregnancies so that another woman can adopt, this is fine, but it is inappropriate to suggest that all women must do so.

4) 90% of unmarried girls and women who give birth keep their babies. Abortion is only one reason why few newborns are available for adoption.

5) There are children available for adoption, many of whom have come into care because their young, immature mother could no longer cope.

**Argument:**

*“What if your mother had aborted you?”*

**Response:**

1) This is illogical thinking; obviously there would be no “you” to know this. The fact that any of us are

here is pure chance. If our parents had had sex one month later, or earlier, we wouldn’t be here. If the telephone had rung at the wrong moment we wouldn’t be here. Some people are here *because* their mother had an earlier abortion which allowed her to have a wanted pregnancy later on.

2) Anti-choice proponents will say that if Beethoven had been aborted the world would have missed his genius. Yet we don’t know how many Beethovens have not been born and never will. One may also wonder what would have happened had Hitler been aborted.

3) It is meaningless to say that humanity loses when a particular child is not born or for that matter, not conceived. A woman at birth has about 400,000 eggs in her ovaries. If she bears 3 children in her lifetime is there any meaningful sense in which we can say that humankind has suffered a loss of these other hundreds of thousands of unfertilized eggs? And what of all the sperm that are not used to fertilize?

**Argument:**

*“What about the rights of the fetus?”*

**Response:**

1) The proper way for social (and therefore governmental) interest in fetal health and wellbeing to be demonstrated is through interest in the health and wellbeing of pregnant women. Society’s concern should be positively demonstrated through such means as universally available pre- and post-natal programs, improved maternity benefits, childcare funding, housing and nutrition, *not* in criminal legislation the purpose of which is to force some women to bear unwanted children against their will.

2) You can’t give embryos and fetuses rights without taking away rights of the woman. If you insist that an embryo has equal rights with a woman, you are in fact giving more rights to that embryo than any actual human being has. No person can be forced to give part of his or her body to keep another person alive, yet anti-choice proponents would make women give their bodies to keep embryos and fetuses alive.

3) An embryo and fetus are potential persons, not persons. In any case, abortion rights for women do not infringe upon the rights of those who choose to regard the embryo and fetus as a person.

4) In their drive to make all abortions illegal, anti-choice groups wrongly claim that the fetus being aborted can think and feel, when scientific studies show that there is no possibility of these capabilities existing in the fetus until the onset of the last trimester of pregnancy.

**Argument:**

*"She had her fun, let her pay for it."*

**Response:**

1) Being my mother's punishment does not seem like a good reason for being born. If I had my choice, I would rather be wanted.

2) The punishing attitude expressed by those who would make a woman "pay" is a clear example of anti-women, anti-sex feelings. The Roman Catholic and other orthodox and fundamentalist churches have taught that sex for pleasure was not allowed. It must be directly related to procreation (having a baby). (Thus the prohibition of masturbation, contraception, abortion, homosexuality.) Historically women's sexuality has been loathed and feared. Thus the paradox of the temptress (Eve) and the pure asexual woman (Mary).

3) If you don't wear a seatbelt, and are in a car accident and injured, should society let you do without medical care because you took a foolish risk? What about smokers who "have fun" while smoking and become sick because of it? Should we punish them by withholding medical care? Should we punish women for engaging in sexual activity that does not lead to procreation?

4) If we are so anxious to make the woman pay, how shall we make the man pay too?

5) Society will pay as well, in the psychological and social costs of forced motherhood and unwanted children.

**Argument:**

*"Abortion should only be allowed for rape or incest."*

**Response:**

1) This argument says, in effect, if you enjoyed sex you cannot have an abortion but if you did not enjoy it (rape or incest) you can. It's a very shaky argument because it reveals those who make it as punishers. It also demolishes the argument that every fetus has equal value because it places less value on a fetus conceived through rape or incest. That is why hard-line opponents of abortion would not allow abortion for any reason.

**Argument:**

*"Rape prevents conception because of the trauma. Therefore we shouldn't worry about rape victims when making our abortion laws."*

**Response:**

1) This is wishful thinking on the part of anti-choice proponents. Any Rape Crises Centre can refute this argument. In the U.S. studies revealed that from 2% to 5.4% of rape victims became pregnant (NARAL brochure on rape and incest).

2) This position is utterly cruel and inhumane. Should the innocent victim of rape or incest be made to suffer for the rest of her life for the crime and brutality forced upon her because of the beliefs of some people?

**Argument:**

*"Rape is violent but abortion is more violent."*

**Response:**

1) This again is wishful thinking on the part of anti-choice proponents. Ask any victim of rape, ask any women who has had an abortion which is violent. Women know the difference between rape and abortion, and "the big lie" techniques of the anti-choice lobby won't convince them.

**Argument:**

*"Nobody has to get pregnant, what with all the contraceptives available."*

**Response:**

1) This argument reveals an ignorance of contraceptive technology and human psychology. No method is 100% safe and effective. The pill, the most effective method, cannot be used by some women. Barrier methods have a much higher failure rate.

2) Researchers say that the proper use of effective contraception is a multi-step process, including: planning for its use, procuring it, communicating with one's partner about its use and ensuring it is used on every occasion. Human beings are not all perfect users of contraceptive methods. Abortion must be available as a back-up for failure of method or failure to use contraceptives.

3) Teenagers do not always acknowledge that they will be sexually active. In addition, it is not easy to discuss contraception with one's partner when one can hardly acknowledge one is a sexual person.

4) Contraceptives are not always available to those who need them. They are not widely publicized and many are costly.

5) This statement reveals an "I'm smart and others are stupid" mentality.

6) Many women are in sexual relationships which are coercive and do not give them control over the use of contraceptives.

**Argument:**

*"Women change their minds, and an unwanted pregnancy becomes wanted once the baby is born."*

**Response:**

1) This may be true for some, but certainly not for all. In one study of women who were refused abortions and who kept their babies, 34% reported that the child was a burden they resented, despite the taboo against admitting this. Researchers say the real percentage is probably higher.

2) Many people change their minds about decisions they have made. Should we not let them make them? Is it our job to protect everyone from making wrong decisions? What about marriage? Some people change their minds after marrying. The idea that women cannot make decisions only perpetuates the infantilization of women (treating women like children).

3) Research on women who have been denied abortion (eg. American Journal of Psychiatry 148:5, May 1991) reveals that compulsory parenthood adversely affects the psychological health of both the women and the unwanted children.

**Argument:**

*"Abortions shouldn't be paid for by Medicare."*

**Response:**

1) Jehovah's Witnesses oppose blood transfusions on religious grounds: does this mean that Medicare should refuse to pay for them? Should we not cover smoking-related illness? etc.

2) It costs Medicare (and taxpayers) more for the delivery and care of any unwanted child than for a first trimester abortion.

3) Total reproductive care must be provided for women, not just that care which some people think should be provided.

4) If abortion is not covered by medical insurance then poor women will not be able to afford them. This means one law for the rich and another for the poor.

5) Abortion is a public health issue. Not providing coverage and limiting access contributes to the ill health (mental, emotional and physical) of women.

It is difficult to see how it can be argued that compulsory pregnancy and childbirth are conducive to the social good. How does society gain by forcing women to bear children they never meant to conceive? How can it, on the one hand, promote good parenting, healthy pregnancies, happy family life, and on the other hand deny women the right to control their fertility and become mothers when and if they want to?