

Born is Not Enough
What it Really Means to be Prolife
By
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June 14, 2026

I want to begin by offering my personal opinion about abortion. The best I can say is that *it is a terrible choice to have to make*. I believe it ought to be a woman's right to make it, but I do not believe it should be taken lightly, nor that abortion should be considered a method of birth control. I value the potential lives those not yet born so greatly that I also strongly support sex education, easy and affordable access to birth control, and planning for parenthood, so that this terrible choice is not one that many will have to face. I also value personal freedom and feel just as strongly that we ought to guarantee a woman's right to choose whether she wishes to remain pregnant or not, up to a point.

Although I do not consider all life sacred, not even all human life, I do hold great reverence for all of it, especially human life. *Sacred* comes from an Old French verb meaning, "to make holy," or "to consecrate." So, it refers to nothing innately true about that which is consecrated but refers only to the feelings and beliefs of those who consecrate it. This attitude, then, may vary from group to group or from person to person and is no more than a projection onto the "sacred" object of their own subjective experience of it; which, again, may indicate nothing that is objectively true about the object of worship itself. Just because one thinks a totem pole is a god, for example, doesn't make it a god.

Reverence, on the other hand, comes from the Latin verb *revereri*, meaning "to stand in awe of." Its English definition is "to regard with deep respect and veneration." This word, then, clearly says something about the projector rather than that which is projected onto, the subject rather than the object. That I hold great reverence for all life, especially human life, says something about me, not about life itself. My feelings toward life, that is, may reflect nothing that is objectively true about it. I am simply a person who regards life with deep respect and veneration.

What does seem objectively true about life is that nature treats it with tremendous disregard. Firstly, there are far more prey animals than predators. Predators could not have evolved if this were not the case. Predators must continuously eat new prey animals throughout their entire lifespans, which means a one-to-one balance would never work in our world. A single owl, for instance, eats thousands of mice over the course of its life. A little brown bat may consume as many as 4,500 insects each night. In order for both predator and prey animals to coexist, prey animals must vastly outnumber predators, which they do. And owls and bats aren't the only predators prey animals must worry about. At any given time, there are three times the number of livestock animals alive than there are humans. We are Earth's apex predator.

So that's inference number one. Whether we subjectively hold reverence for life, as I do, or consider it sacred, as those who call themselves "prolife" claim they believe, objectively speaking, we live in a world that is extraordinarily hostile toward life.

Inference number two is that we live in a world that aborts far more life, or at least the potential for life, than it can possibly bring to fruition. This is to guarantee that at least some potential lives, an incredibly small portion of them, will survive the brutalities of existence, at least long enough to produce more offspring. A couple of years ago, for example, a pair of robins built a nest on our porch. Four hatchlings soon emerged. At one point a couple of crows attempted to raid the nest. They failed, but it turned out that the nest was made only large enough to accommodate two growing chicks. Two of them were eventually pushed out by their siblings, plummeting to their deaths. If this is the norm, it means robins hatch roughly twice as many chicks as survive. In nature, this is similar for most animals, those that lay dozens to thousands of eggs and those that give live birth to relatively large broods and litters.

Over the course of their existence, plants and trees also produce far more seeds and fruit than will ever become new plants and trees. A single oak tree can produce ten to twenty million acorns during its relatively long life, few of which grow into trees, partly because all those innocent little prey animals eat them. Likewise, a human male produces about 100-million sperm per ejaculation, but, thankfully, doesn't produce 100-million kids. Nor does but an infinitesimally small fraction of each woman's approximately 350,000 eggs result in a birth, thank goodness. Like all creatures, humans also have an expiration date. We live long enough to bear and raise children, then begin to grow old until we eventually succumb to heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's, cancer, or some other fatal illness. Talk about feeling used!

I could go on with this chain of thought, but my point is that no matter how sacred we consider life nor how much we revere it, the reality is that nature wastes more life than it produces, guarantees only a short life of fear, predation, and an agonizing death for most creatures, and has assured that all of us will die no matter how much we yearn to go on living.

Bottom line, our attitudes about the abortion issue, along with those of a similar vein, like the death penalty or medically assisted suicide, are rooted in our subjective feelings as human beings, not in the minds of our gods nor the objective moral truth we project them onto. Of course, there's nothing wrong with approaching the world from a human perspective, since that's the only perspective we can approach it from. But we ought to do so knowingly, rather than treating our perspectives as if they are based on some sacred or absolute truth that everyone else must agree with and adhere to.

Still, those in the prolife movement say that life is sacred and believe they are acting on behalf of their Christian god by protecting the unborn from abortion. Yet there is nothing in

their scriptures supporting this position. There are, on the contrary, stories in their scriptures in which God calls for his followers to kill everyone; every last man, woman, child, and animal. Indeed, one of their most treasured stories, one they tell their children as if it were a pleasant fairytale, is the story of a flood in which a genocidal god wipes out almost every person and every living thing on the planet.

Nor is there anything among the teachings of Jesus that call for his followers to preserve life at every cost. He does speak of creating an abundant life for those who are alive, which he demonstrated by feeding the poor, healing the sick, and embracing the outcasts. He also said there is no greater love than to give one's life for others, indicating that some things are more important than life. He certainly didn't make an idol of life like today's prolife advocates do. Christianity's main symbol, the cross, sometimes with Jesus still on it, represents his own such sacrifice and execution. According to the scripture, his death was itself a type of abortion. "[The Father] sent his one and only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:9-10)

Where, then, is this contemporary dogmatism about abortion coming from? It is dogma that has no basis in Christian scripture or tradition. As a former fundamentalist Christian myself, I believe it is compensation for a failure to adhere to Jesus' actual life affirming example and teachings, and for Christianity's historic and continuing disregard for human welfare and life. Jesus never spoke of the unborn, let alone indicated that our commitment to the welfare of others ends once they are outside the womb. He spoke about creating an abundant life and establishing Heaven here on Earth by caring for the welfare of those who have been born; by feeding them, healing them, and including them—everything they need, not only to survive, but to thrive as human beings.

If prolife advocates genuinely care about life, why is it they aren't as incensed about the lack of gun control laws in the U.S. as they are about wanting stricter abortion laws? Why is it okay to restrict a woman's right to choose whether she will remain pregnant, but not okay to restrict a man's right to own a military style assault rifle, the kind used to frequently slaughter children in their classrooms, among others already on this side of the womb? Why is it okay to defund and shut down clinics that offer women's health care, prenatal care, contraception, sex education, and abortion for those who choose it, but not okay to take away the guns that are being used to kill people on our streets and in our homes, schools, and businesses? Why is it okay for our partisan Supreme Court to turn the matter of abortion over to our states, but to insist on the right to own weapons—unlike any weapons that existed when the country was established—is a nationwide Constitutional right?

Where are they when it comes to protecting the lives of the living from the deadly and destructive consequences of global warming—an undeniable reality they not only neglect, but continue to deny, gaslighting the rest of us, while also blocking us from doing anything

meaningful to collectively address this lethal crisis? Where are they when the fires burn down entire communities? Where are they when rivers of rain fall so quickly and unexpectedly that they drown our children while asleep at summer camp? Where are they when the President of the United States forcibly separates children from their families and puts them in cold cages on a concrete floor? Where are they when fifty percent of those living in poverty on the streets of Gaza are children? Where are they when bombs drop on those streets killing scores of innocent civilians, mostly children, in a ruthless act of vengeance and retribution? Where are they when it comes to insuring the children born in this country have adequate food, shelter, clothing, and security? Where are they when it comes to ensuring that they have adequate healthcare? Where is there concern for life and for the living in such matters as these?

A few years ago, I was dropping something off at the local Planned Parenthood and was approached by a so-called prolife advocate in the parking lot. After telling me abortion is a sin, I asked, "Then you must be in support of birth control, sex education, and planning for parenthood?"

"We're for abstinence only birth control," she responded.

Such contradiction, if not hypocrisy, is why I conclude their dogmatic obsession with abortion, which requires them to put no real skin in the game, is but a ruse to convince others, but mostly themselves, that they are good Christian people, doing their religious duty to do what Jesus said, "protect the lives of the unborn," which he never said. Rather, if Jesus were alive today, my guess is he'd be risking his life on the streets of Gaza, or in Iran, or with worried parents who can't afford to take their sick children to a doctor, or with those whose homes have been burned down because of an unnecessary climate crisis, or with anyone else whose life and livelihood is being diminished by neglect, cruelty, and injustice. Born is not enough. If people want to follow Jesus, then do as he did—feed the hungry, heal the sick, care for the poor, welcome the outcast. That's what it means to be prolife. It's not about unborn American fetuses, but about the welfare of every living person on the planet, and for the welfare of the planet itself, which sustains all our lives.

Yet, as I began, I also believe abortion is a terrible choice to have to make. I believe this is so because I care more about human potential than I do about human life. Let that sink in for a moment. *I care more about human potential than I do about human life.* I agree with social psychologists Erich Fromm, who said the whole meaning of life is to "develop into the individual one potentially is,"¹ and that, "The duty to be alive is the same as the duty to become oneself."² Yet too many of us waste our lives, either because we don't realize it is about finding and fulfilling some greater purpose and calling, or because our social system is such that we must spend our lives pursuing our most basic needs, and have little time, energy, or resources to concentrate on anything else. Aborting our potential or maintaining social systems that require too many of us to abort such potential, is the real sin.

And this is another reality human societies prefer not to face. Instead, we tell ourselves life is about growing up, getting a job, and spending our lives working to pay our bills. That's often what becomes the meaning of our lives. But it isn't and shouldn't have to be. That kind of life only addresses the bottom half of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs—often inadequately, at that. It doesn't promote the upper part of the pyramid reflecting our need to fully unfold as individuals by finding love and belonging, self-esteem and purpose, and to strive, not just to get by, but to find meaning beyond ourselves through service to others and to life itself.

As a first principles thinker, I don't value life for the sake of life itself. I ask what life is for and, thus, value it for its potential. And I consider it tragic if such potential is lost for any reason, due to premature death, poverty, oppression, depression, murder, war, the chronic struggle to make simple ends meet, and, yes, because of abortion. In my mind, when a zygote is formed human potential exists, and the loss of such potential at any phase of its existence is tragic.

I have a small baby Mickey Mouse toy that's nearly 36 years old. I bought it for our baby soon after we learned Peggy was pregnant with our first child. I remember how excited we were to hear its heartbeat at just six weeks—a heart full of human potential. Just a couple of days later, Peggy had a very painful miscarriage and had to be rushed to the emergency room for a DNC, which, in clinical terms, means to “remove tissue from the uterus.”

That little flicker of life, it turned out, wasn't viable, not any more than millions of sperm and hundreds of thousands of eggs, that missed their chance opportunity at life in favor of that failed pregnancy. But I still keep baby Mickey where I can see him every day, as a reminder of the human potential that ended 36 years ago. Sometimes, I pick it up and wonder about the person whose unforgettable heartbeat I heard so long ago might have become. I also know that if the pregnancy had lasted, the two children we do have would not have been born and I can't imagine our lives without them. Still, I sometimes wonder, if multiverse theory is correct, if there is some world out there where our first child was born and is alive and what kind of life they are living, and what kind of life I'm living because they're in it.

Born is not enough. That's where the proliferers get it wrong. Life isn't about being born, nor merely breathing and having a heartbeat. It's about becoming. It's about realizing our potential as individuals and as a species. And that's a point that I think many of us miss, regardless of what side of this issue we're on.

¹ Fromm, Erich, *Man for Himself*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, NY, 1947, p. 20.

² Ibid.