

Example: proposition of value (Manuscript)

Ghosts - Ken Lonquist

Specific Purpose: To persuade my audience that abortion is morally wrong.
Central Idea: Abortion is morally wrong because it is the taking of a human life.
Method of Organization: Topical

Introduction: The introduction is long (paragraphs 1-7), complex, and in some ways quite artful. Its major function, in addition to the usual functions of an introduction, is to get the audience to listen to the speaker even though they disagree with him. The opening paragraph does an excellent job of gaining attention with its suspenseful images of "ghosts in this room." In paragraphs 2-4 the speaker chastises listeners who say their minds "cannot be changed" and tries to build his credibility by identifying his position with that of nineteenth-century abolitionists. Paragraphs 5-6 introduce the central idea of the speech by claiming that the stand of people who favor legalized abortion today is analogous to that of pro-slavery forces in the 1840s. Paragraph 7 completes the introduction by previewing some of the major questions to be pursued in the body.

When delivered in class, this introduction works very effectively. But many students who read it as a manuscript find it troublesome. The initial paragraph, they say, is confusing because it suggests that the speech is actually about ghosts or some other paranatural phenomenon. Moreover, they feel that the comparisons among proabortionists, antiabortionists, and slave owners are dragged out much longer than necessary. Finally, they claim that the topic of the speech is never clearly announced in the introduction. When this speech is discussed in class, a keen debate usually develops among students over the merits of the introduction.

Reasoning: This speech is dominated by reasoning from analogy. The speaker develops a series of analogies in which the undeveloped fetus is compared with black slaves before the Civil War, proabortionists with slave owners, and antiabortionists with abolitionists. Just as the slaves had a right to freedom, the speaker claims, so the fetus has a right to life. Just as slave owners were wrong in claiming that their rights of property superseded the rights of black men and women to freedom, so proabortionists are wrong in claiming that the right of women to control their own bodies supersedes the right of the fetus to life. And just as abolitionists were right in fighting to free the slaves, so antiabortionists are right in fighting to save the lives of unborn children. These analogies run throughout the speech and can be found, explicitly or implicitly, in paragraphs 1-6, 9-10, 16-17, 19, and 24-25.

1 There are ghosts in this room. We cannot see them, but they are here. They have come to us from a far off place—some billowing up out of the pages of history

books, others returning to us after only a short absence. Some are large; some are old; some are very young; and some are very, very small. Some are the ghosts of men and women who more than a century ago trod upon the same ground which we are treading today. Some are spirits which look to us for justice—tiny spirits that look to us for retribution for an act of wrong that was committed against them. And then there are the other ghosts—ourselves, the ghosts which we, ourselves, have become—puppets in a judgment play which is being dusted off and reenacted by history after centuries.

2 I first became aware of these ghosts when I announced to you the nature of my discourse for today. Those who were hostile in their reaction to my subject — those who said to me, “Our minds cannot be changed,” those who said in effect, “We will not listen” — made me think: “What kind of a people are we? What kind of a people have we become when we will no longer listen to one another?”

3 In that moment, I was haunted by visions of a bygone era—a time in which abolitionists were afforded much the same treatment as I had just been. For, you see, they too were involved in a titanic, moral struggle—a grave moral crisis. They were speaking out against a notion that was deeply imbedded in the minds of nineteenth-century men and women—the notion that black men and black women were not human. They were speaking out against slavery—that wicked by-product of prejudice. At times they were ignored by indifferent masses. At times they were tarred and feathered and run out of town. At times they were murdered. Never were they listened to, because the men and the women of the nineteenth century who favored human bondage had decided that their minds could not be changed on the matter. They had decided that they would not listen.

4 Now I have come here today, as you all know, to speak for life—human life and human rights. And there is something—something about my subject which seems strangely reminiscent—reminiscent of, and haunted by, the days, the people, and the events of the nineteenth century. It is more than just a parallel between the treatment that was accorded abolitionist speakers and the treatment that is accorded anti-abortionist speakers today. It is deeper than that. It rests in the very heart of the issue — in the very heart of each moral struggle.

5 You see, in the 1840s it was argued by pro-slavery forces that their rights as citizens of the United States were being subverted by abolitionists who were working to eradicate slavery. “The abolitionists,” they argued, “are denying us our

constitutional right to hold property." They could not see that their rights of property could not supersede the rights of black men and black women to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They could not see, because they did not regard black men or black women to be of human life. They were blinded by the prejudice of their age.

6 And today a similar logic has been evolved by the proponents of abortion. They argue that their rights of self-determination are being infringed upon by those who would take away the option of terminating a pregnancy. They do not recognize that they are determining the course of not one life, but two. They cannot see because they do not recognize a human life in its earliest stages to be human.

7 Now there are many kinds of life, and what we have to ask ourselves is, "What is life? What is human life? What are the values we attach to human life? What are the rights we grant to those whom we say possess human life?" These are the questions which I believe must be asked when dealing with the matter of abortion. These are the questions over which this whole controversy rages.

Body: The body of the speech can be divided into five main sections. The first section starts in paragraph 8 and develops the speaker's view that "a fertilized egg is human life"—just like other forms of human life. The second section begins in paragraph 13 and claims that it is wrong to take any form of human life, regardless of its color, creed, age, or sex. The third section begins in paragraph 15 and argues that the violence of our time has blinded many people from seeing the wrongness of abortion. The fourth section begins in paragraph 17 and deals with the counterarguments that women have a right to control their own bodies and that abortion is socially beneficial. The fifth section begins in paragraph 20 and is addressed specifically to the women in the audience.

8 The concept of life is not so difficult to understand. We look at a stone and we say, "It does not live." We look at a flower and we say, "It lives." We may crush the flower, it dies. A biological process has been halted, and the mysterious thing that we call life has been taken away.

9 As I said before, there are many kinds of life. And each is distinct from all the rest. The kind of life that we possess is human life. We all recognize this to be true. But down through the course of the centuries there have been those who, for reasons of fulfilling their own ends, have attempted to qualify the definition of

human life. For centuries slaveholders claimed that blacks were not human. For them, color was the key element in defining the humanity of an individual. Today there are many who claim that a human being in its earliest states is not a human being — and that the life it possesses as a biologically functioning entity is not a human life. In their mentality, age becomes the key element in determining the humanity of an individual.

10 Once there was a color line. Today there is an age line. But an age-line definition of humanity is no more just — is just as fallacious, and just as evil, as was the color line which existed in the past.

11 Even in the textbook The Essentials of Human Embryology, it says, "The fertilized egg is the beginning of a new individual." It cannot be denied. The fertilized egg is, itself, a human being in its earliest stages. It is not a zebra; it is not a monkey. It is human. Whether or not it is a fully developed human is not the issue. The issue is humanity. And a fertilized egg is human life.

12 Look around you at the other members of this class. Just look for a moment and ask yourselves, "Was there ever a time in the existence of any of us here in which we were nonhuman?" I do not believe so.

13 Now we have laws. We do not have any laws which govern the lives of plants. We have but one law which governs the life of an animal. That animal is man. The law has been written and rewritten down through the course of the centuries — in stone, on leather, on parchment, on paper, in languages that have been lost and long forgotten. But the law has remained the same. No man, it states, may take the life of another man. Perhaps you would recognize it this way: "We hold these truths to be self-evident — that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights—that among these rights are life." Or this way, quite simply stated, in another book: "Thou shalt not kill."

14 Whatever their form, the laws are there. And there were no qualifications written into these laws on the basis of race, on the basis of color, on the basis of creed, on the basis of sex—nor were there any qualifications written into these laws on the basis of age. What the whole matter boils down to is this: A human life has been determined by us, for centuries, millennia, to be sacred, and we have determined that it cannot be taken away. And a fertilized egg is human life.

15 Now for any violations of these laws to occur, especially on a grand scale as is happening today, a mentality has to have been developed through which those who are going to commit a wrong can justify their actions and can appease the guilt that they might feel — the guilt that they might feel if they had to admit that they were killing a living human entity. And this is what we have done. This is what we are doing. We have learned to call a flower a stone. Why? And how?

16 You see, we are blinded. Just as Americans of another generation were blinded by prejudice, we are blinded by violence. We live in a violent society, in which the killing of a young human being means no more to us than the holding in bondage of black men and black women meant to another generation of Americans. Said E. Z. Freidenburg on this matter, "Not only do most people accept violence if it is perpetrated by legitimate authority — they also regard violence against certain kinds of people as inherently legitimate, no matter who commits it." An abolitionist once was speaking about this condition, and he said, "You might call it paralysis of the nerves about the heart, in a people constantly given over to selfish aims." We have become selfish. And in our selfishness, have become heartless.

17 We say that it is our right to control our bodies, and this is true. But there is a distinction that needs to be made, and that distinction is this: Preventing a pregnancy is controlling a body — controlling your body. But preventing the continuance of a human life that is not your own is murder. If you attempt to control the body of another in that fashion, you become as a slave master was — controlling the lives and the bodies of his slaves, chopping off their feet when they ran away, or murdering them if it pleased him. This was not his right; it is not our right.

18 Abortion is often argued for in terms of its beneficiality. It is better, some say, that these young human beings do not come into the world. It is better for them; it is better for the parents; it is better for society at large. And they may be right. It may be more beneficial.

19 But what we are arguing is not beneficiality. We are not arguing pragmatism. We are not arguing convenience. We are arguing right and wrong. It was more convenient for slaveholders to maintain a system of slavery, but it was wrong. A matter of principle cannot be compromised for a matter of convenience. It cannot be done.

20 Now I'd like to say something more about the whole matter. I'd like to say something particularly to the women in the room, who I think should understand more clearly what I have to say now than the men.

There is another major analogy in paragraphs 21-22. Here the speaker claims that the powerless state of women historically is similar to the powerless state of the undeveloped fetus today. Just as it was wrong for men to use their power to deprive women of their rights, so it is wrong for women to use their power to deprive "another segment of humanity" of its right to life.

21 For thousands of years women have been deprived of their rights. They have been second-class citizens and have been, in the eyes of many, something less than human themselves. For thousands of years they have been controlled, physically and mentally, by men. They have been controlled through physical power and physical coercion. But in this age of enlightenment—in this age of feminism—it has rightly been determined that might does not make right. The fact that males might be able to physically dominate females did not make their doing so just, and it did not mean that females were not deserving of protection under the law so that they might pursue the course of their choice.

22 But today, after tens of thousands of years, the tables are turning. Today men and women (who more than any man should understand the shameful and the unjustness and the inhumanity involved in control through physical power) have been determining not the roles that another segment of humanity will have in life, but whether or not this segment of humanity will have life at all. Under the pretext of controlling their own bodies, they are setting out on a course of controlling the bodies of others. After tens of thousands of years, they are transferring the shackles in which they themselves have languished, and against which they have struggled, onto a new segment of humanity—only with a difference. The shackles have been transformed into a guillotine.

Conclusion: The conclusion consists of paragraphs 23-25. The speaker seeks to reinvigorate feelings of guilt and personal responsibility for abortion. He turns again to the ghost imagery used in the introduction, and he invokes once more the analogy between abortion and slavery. The final paragraph is particularly effective in bringing the speech full circle and reinforcing its emotional appeal.

23 Why? It has happened because no one will do anything about it. No one will stop it. We are all like ghosts in the fire. We are all involved. Although we do not hold the knife in our hand, neither do we stay the hand that does hold the knife.

24 History is repeating itself. Abraham Lincoln once said that the eyes of history were upon us and that we would be remembered in spite of ourselves. He also said, "We are engaged in a cause, a struggle, not just for today, but for all the ensuing generations."

25 And so are we. Ghosts are crowding around us, and looking, and watching what we do. Frederick Douglass once said, in speaking of black bondage, "I hear the mournful wail of millions." Today there are the ghosts of the past, the ghosts of the present, and the ghosts of all the ensuing generations watching us, and watching the struggle that is being repeated — the struggle of human life. I, too, hear the mournful wail of millions.

Analogies focus attention on the questions of value involved in the abortion controversy. Yet in many ways the persuasiveness of this speech to a hostile audience may depend more on a question of fact than on a question of value. In essence, the speech can be seen as advancing an argument from principle:

General Principle:	The killing of human beings is wrong.
Minor Premise:	The fertilized egg is a human being.
Conclusion:	Therefore, the killing of fertilized eggs is wrong.

The first premise, a question of value, is supported in paragraphs 13-14. Most listeners, regardless of their views on abortion, are likely to accept this premise. The second premise, essentially a question of fact, is supported in paragraphs 11-12. This is the crucial premise for listeners who favor abortion. Yet the speaker backs it up with only one piece of evidence. He says, "Even in the textbook, which is called The Essentials of Human Life, it says 'the fertilized egg is the beginning of a new individual'" (paragraph 11). But this quotation does not explicitly support the speaker's view. Moreover, even if it did, one brief quotation from a textbook whose author is not identified would probably not be strong enough evidence to persuade a listener who opposes the speaker's position. Given the opposition of his listeners, the speaker should have done a more thorough job of supporting his second premise.