

Bill Nye The Abortion Guy

Analyzing Bill Nye's Arguments For A Pro-Choice Position In The Abortion Debate

I grew up in the golden era of kids' public television. Sesame Street was in its glory days, while Wishbone, the Magic School Bus, and Barney were just beginning. But one of the most classic educational T.V. shows was Bill Nye the Science Guy. He made science understandable, cool, and relevant, even to elementary aged kids like me! With awesome 90's music, lots of goofy skits, and many practical and hands-on activities, Bill Nye earned a place on PBS in nearly every home in America!

But now a days, Bill Nye is known for other things. His advocacy in popular culture for science, science education and funding, climate change action, and evolutionary theory has become his trademark. He has been featured on numerous talk shows, news interviews, and rallies and has even debated leading Young-Earth creationist Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis in a widely publicized debate. People listen intently to what Bill Nye has to say on just about any subject he addresses.

So when a video of him being interviewed by the Big Think organization about abortion came across social media, it was bound to be culturally significant. In this video¹, Bill Nye attempts to show the foolishness of opposing abortion. Indeed, it was shared many thousands of times on Facebook and used by many (teens and adults) to justify a pro-abortion stance.

However, while this video has been convincing to many pro-choice advocates and troubling to many pro-life advocates, Bill Nye demonstrates a tremendous incompetence in engaging in rational argumentation. If this is seriously how he engages this, literally, life and death issue, one has to wonder how American education has become so deluded as to be persuaded by it! The blunders Nye makes in reasoning are basic and obvious and are very telling of our current culture.

So just what is Nye's devastating argument to the pro-life position on abortion? Why are unborn humans not really humans? In his own words, "Eggs get fertilized, and by that I mean sperm get accepted by ova a lot. But that's not all you need. You have to attach to the uterine wall, the inside of a womb." For Nye, the fertilized egg is not human because it hasn't attached to the woman's womb yet. But, is the egg a turtle? Is it an elephant? It is a fertilized "what" egg?

It is a fertilized human egg. The classification of "human" has nothing to do with stage of development. It has to do with biological order. Am I more of a human now than I was as a newborn? Just because an egg hasn't attached to the womb doesn't mean it isn't human. It just means it is at its earlier stage of development and won't continue to develop unless it attaches.

But why is this an issue for Nye? Why does he think this argument is so powerful? He goes on to say,

"But if you're going to hold that as a standard, that is to say, if you're going to say that when an egg is fertilized it has the same rights as an individual, then whom are you going to sue? Who are you going to imprison? Every woman who has had a fertilized egg pass through her? Every guy whose sperm fertilized an egg and then it didn't become a human? Have all these people failed you? It is just a reflection of a deep scientific lack of understanding."

In other words, because many, maybe even most, fertilized eggs die before they attach to the womb naturally, it is inconsistent to hold people accountable for abortions when natural abortions happen all the time. Are you going to throw those people in jail too? But there is a massive difference between a natural event and a forced one. People die every day. Are we inconsistent for punishing murderers?

Continuing on to his next point, Nye states, rather condescendingly,

"You literally, or apparently, literally don't know what you're talking about. You wouldn't know how big a human egg was if it weren't for microscopes, if it weren't for scientists, for medical researchers looking diligently. You wouldn't know the process. You wouldn't have that shot, the famous shot or shots, where the sperm are bumping up against the egg. You wouldn't have that without science. So then to claim that you know the next step when you obviously don't, it's trouble."

Nye seems to think this is making a relevant point, but it is difficult to see how. How does the fact that science helps us see how life works support ending that life whenever we choose? It is the passion of Nye's life to talk about the importance of science, and good for him. But what Nye continually fails to

¹ Nye, Bill. *Women Deserve More Reproductive Rights, Not Fewer*.
<https://www.facebook.com/BigThinkdotcom/videos/10153624695463527/>

realize is that there is a difference between what we can see in the microscope and what we should do with what we see in the microscope. I can see E. coli bacteria in a microscope, but should I purposely infect my lab partner with it? The obvious answer is “No,” but the microscope itself doesn’t care. There is a vast difference between observation and ethics.

Next, Nye moves from his argument to begin to plead with his viewers. Taking a very personal tone, he states, “It’s hard not to get frustrated with this everybody. Nobody likes abortion, ok?” While it is good that Nye sees abortion as less than desirable, one cannot help but ask “Why don’t people like abortion? Is there something wrong with it?” If there is nothing wrong with abortion, why would anyone not like it? He continues, “But you can’t tell somebody what to do.” The irony of this statement is incredible! Nye is telling us not to tell people what to do! This is called a self-defeating statement. If true, it is false because it is violating its own principle. It is like stating “But you can’t use English!” Of course we can tell people what to do. Laws do it all the time!

After committing this elementary blunder, Nye moves to responding to the solutions to abortion that have been offered at various times. He states,

“At some point we have to respect the facts. Recommending or insisting on abstinence has been completely ineffective. I’m just being objective here. Closing abortion clinics, not giving women access to birth control has not been an effective way to lead to healthier societies. I think we all know that.”

In truth, Nye is partly correct. These things haven’t stopped abortion or made society healthier. But consider three things. First, you don’t do these things simply because they will pragmatically make things better, but because they are right. Second, just because something hasn’t been effective to stop abortion doesn’t mean you give into abortion. As a parallel, there have been many attempts to stop cancer, but so far, cancer is still be rampant. Should we abandon all research and just let people have cancer? Of course not! Cancer, like abortion, which Nye already admitted was not ideal and so there must be something wrong with it, is bad and we should work to eliminate it. Third, abortion has continued, not because of the failure of these alternatives, but because of the failure of culture to advocate for them and to follow them. Imagine if Nye spent more time instructing young people to show restraint in who they slept with instead of fighting for their freedom to end an unborn human’s life?

As the video proceeds, Nye once again pleads with his listeners, stating,

“And I understand that you have deeply held beliefs and it really is out of respect for people, and in this case, your perception of unborn people. I understand that. But I really encourage you to look at the facts. And I know that people are now critical of the expression ‘fact based,’ but what’s wrong with that?”

To what facts is he referring? The only fact he has mentioned is that, in order to be viable, a fertilized egg must be attached to the womb. But this fact does not stand alone. Nye is assuming that this fact means his position is right. But it means nothing of the sort. Though it is not clear who Nye is referring to in stating that “people are now critical of the expression ‘fact based,’” but basing one’s view on facts is a good thing. But one must consider all facts, not just the ones you happen to agree with and the facts state that the fertilized egg, from that moment of fertilization, is a living human being. This fertilized egg is able to metabolize energy, react to its environment, and it has its own genetic code, distinct from its mother. And we all know this. The moment people are aware of their pregnancies, they instantly know there is a living human inside of them. Unless, that is, the baby is unwanted. Then they deny its life or humanity. This is nothing more than a rationalization of a choice the mother wants to make.

In a final plea, Nye beseeches the viewer, “So I just really encourage you to not tell women what to do and not pursue these laws that really are in nobody’s best interest.” Nobody, that is, except the baby, who gets to live. But Nye continues, “Just really be objective about this. We have other problems to solve everybody. Come on, come on. Let’s work together. My mother was a woman, just for example. They’re everywhere.” According to Nye, we should forget about the abortion issue because there are other problems in the world. But having other problems doesn’t eliminate any problems. Take Nye’s own passion of climate change. There are other problems in the world besides climate change. Just being objective, climate change is not the only issue facing the world. Therefore, according to Nye’s argument, we ought not worry about it.

In the end, Nye’s attempt to defend a pro-abortion stance, or as he would call it, a pro-choice choice, falls prey to logical analysis. Unfortunately, many have pointed this out and yet the critic has gone unnoticed. One can only hope that, after reading reviews such as this, more people would honestly assess their justification for taking the life of a human baby.