

Session 5: —Tactics: What Dr. Zeke Gets Wrong

1. Note about framing—Dr. Zeke never cited a formal pro-life syllogism and never showed where it went wrong. He just launched into his own presentation. Thus, he did not refute much of anything. The pro-life argument he was obliged to refute goes like this:

P1: It is wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being.

P2: Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being.

Therefore,

C: Abortion is wrong

You can refute this syllogism by showing the conclusion does not follow from the premises or that one of more of the premises is false. Dr. Zeke did neither. Thus, your case stands.

2. Note about cumulative cases—if one part is weak, whole case sinks. You cannot string a bunch of leaky buckets together and think you have a case that holds water.
3. Note about intuitions—They are not infallible, though we are justified believing them until proven otherwise.
4. Intuitions—burning research lab flaws:
 - (a) Analogy is wrong headed—it’s about who we should save. Abortion is about who we can intentionally kill.
 - (b) How does it follow that because I save on human over others, the ones left behind are not human?
 - (c) What if the choice was save 1,000 frozen embryos or 100 people in final stages of terminal cancer?
 - (d) The Secret Service will take a bullet for the President but not you. Are you less human than he is?
 - (e) What if the choice was save your own frozen embryos or a stranger?
5. Intuitions—lethal force argument flaws:
 - (a) What follows is that pro-life advocates will work to stop killing, not kill individual abortionists
 - (b) WWII example of Allies dropping incognito behind German lines
6. Intuitions—“whole life” objection
 - (a) How does it follow that because I oppose the intentional killing of an innocent human being, I am responsible to solve other societal ills? Is the American Cancer Society negligent for fighting one disease rather than many?
 - (b) Even if we did everything critics demand, would they oppose abortion? (Never!)
 - (c) Even if we fail to live out our pro-life convictions, doe that refute our syllogism?

7. Intuitions—the “against all killing” inconsistency objection (applied to war/capital punishment):
 - (a) Strawman—Pro-lifers do not argue that all killing is wrong. See our syllogism. We argue it’s wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being, abortion does that, therefore, it is wrong.
 - (b) Even if we are inconsistent, how does that refute our syllogism or justify intentional killing of unborn?
 - (c) We are not inconsistent: Generals in a just war can foresee the deaths of innocent human beings but not intend them. With abortion, we foresee the death of the unborn AND intend the death of the unborn.
8. Intuitions—daughter rape objection: I would not have her abort. But suppose I did. How does my wrong decision refute the pro-life syllogism?
9. Intuitions—prosecute women objection: Again, could unborn still be human and killing them still be wrong even if pro-lifers fail to apply their principles consistently? (Meeting of the minds / testimony from woman)
10. Science—Twining objection: How does it follow that because an entity may split, it wasn’t a whole living organism prior to the split (flatworm example)? Moreover, if the unborn are not human because a twin can be formed from it and a twin can be formed from one of us, does it follow we are not fully human?
11. Science—Miscarriage: How does it follow that because nature spontaneously triggers a miscarriage that a) the unborn are not human or b) I may intentionally kill them? Earthquakes in the 3rd World do not justify murder.
12. Science—cells alive/life a continuous process: Just because life began ages ago does not mean each of us did not have a distinct beginning, fertilization. Moreover, bodily (somatic cells) do not function as embryos. The latter coordinates its own internal development. Mere clumps of cells do nothing like that. The objection confuses parts with wholes.
13. Science—women don’t grieve miscarriages like they do the deaths of older kids. Question: How do my feelings about something change what it is?
14. Philosophy—biological life vs. personhood: Why should anyone think there can be such a thing as a human that is not a person? (More on this later.)
15. Philosophy—Bodily rights (Thomson) objection: The parallels between being hooked up to a total stranger and a mother being hooked up to her own child do not work. Whole argument collapses.
16. Theology—Bible silent objection: Ask, “Are you saying that whatever the Bible does not condemn it condones? If not, what is your point? I can show the Bible is pro-life even if Scripture is silent (as we will see later).

17. Theology—Shouldn't impose objection: We are not imposing. We are proposing. Dismissing an argument with a label is not a refutation.
18. Sociological objection—crime: We can reduce crime by killing male toddlers in inner cities. Should we do it? Whole objection assumes the unborn are not human.
19. Sociological objection—Can't change 45 years of liberal abortion laws. Did that argument work for racial segregation? Women having the right to vote? Slavery?

What's the Abortion Debate Really About?

Summary: The abortion debate is not about a surgical procedure. It's about a larger worldview question that defies compromise.

The essential pro-life argument:

P1: It is wrong to intentionally kill an innocent human being.

P2: Abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being.

C: Therefore, abortion is wrong.

In every discussion with critics, ask, "Does this objection refute my essential pro-life argument (syllogism) or is it beside the point?"

What's driving the abortion debate?

1. It's not about who loves women and who hates them.
2. It's not about "whole life" vs. "anti-abortion." (They would still hate us and support abortion even if we did all they demand.)
3. It's not about legal neutrality. (The state must take a position.)
4. It's not about moral neutrality. (Both sides answer the same question, What makes humans valuable?)

Rather, it's a serious philosophic debate about who counts as one of us. Either you believe that each and every human being has a right to life or you don't.

Both sides answer the same question, What makes humans valuable in the first place? There are two rival views:

1. Endowment View—Humans are valuable in virtue of what they are, not functions they perform.
2. Performance View—Being human is nothing special. Immediately exercising a given function is.

Idling beneath the performance view is a philosophical anthropology known as body-self dualism. According to body-self dualism, the real you is not your body, which is mere matter in

motion. Rather, the real you is your thoughts, desires, aims, capacity to reason, etc. Before you gain (or once you lose) cognitive function in those areas, your living body exists but you do not.

Personhood theory applies body-self dualism to law and ethics. Personhood theory says being human isn't enough to ground your right to life. Only "persons" have that right—that is, those who achieve a certain level of cognitive functioning. Lose that function and you forfeit your rights.

Personhood theory grounded in body-self dualism is dangerous and deeply problematic:

1. It's totally subjective—Why should anyone think there can be such a thing as a human who is not a person? And who decides which traits matter? Why are those traits value-giving in the first place? Answer: cultural elites have declared it so. Might makes right.
2. It's counterintuitive—If pressed, you must say, "My body existed before I did" or "I was mere matter until my conscious self showed up." It also means your mother has never hugged you, since you cannot hug desires, aims, and a capacity to reason. We only hug bodies! Moreover, sensory acts like seeing involve both the body and the mind.
3. It cannot account for human equality—if an arbitrarily selected trait like self-awareness gives us value and you have more of it than me, you have a greater right to life than me. You can toss human equality out the window.
4. It distorts human "dignity"—confusing intrinsic dignity (which we have in virtue of our humanity) with attributed dignity (which we only gain through accomplishment). The beach bum and the university professor have equal intrinsic dignity but not equal attributed dignity. The right to life is grounded in the former.
5. It provides philosophical foundation for involuntary euthanasia and involuntary organ donation. After all, the rights of actual persons override those of potential persons. Suppose "desires" determines a right to life. To borrow from Frank Beckwith, imagine a surgeon alters the brain of a developing fetus so it never desires anything. Later, at age 5, the child is killed so its body parts can treat disease in others. Was the child wronged given he had no desires, including a desire to go on living?

Application: clarifying the issue with a critic who accuses you of hating women—

I hope you don't believe pro-lifers hate women, but I think you are right about one thing: If the unborn are not members of the human family, I am indeed unfairly imposing my views on women. However, if each and every human being has an equal right to life, and the unborn is one of us, can you see things my way? That is, if you shared my position that abortion intentionally kills an innocent human being, wouldn't you do everything you could to stop it? Wouldn't you want unborn humans protected by law just like everyone else? Of course, I realize you don't share my position, so my point here is really quite modest: The issue that separates us is not that I hate women and you love them. What separates us is that I believe the unborn are members of the human family and you don't. That's the issue I hope we can talk about.