



Greenpeace

Update from Jacob Burow - June 2013



I noticed a man who seemed out of place on a college campus. He was in his forties, at least. His long hair was in a ponytail, and he was sporting a Greenpeace tee-shirt. It looked like he was asking people to sign a petition.

I was debriefing one of my students about his conversations, when “Greenpeace” came and sat near me on our concrete bench. When I noticed that he was studying our large, towering exhibit, I decided to strike up conversation.

“Greenpeace, huh? Do you work for them, or do you just like the tee-shirt?”

“Oh, I work for them.”

“What do you do?”

“Advocacy. Save the trees; save the whales; that sort of thing. But we don’t have an official position on abortion.” I smiled at the way he tacked on that last sentence.

“So, do you have a personal opinion on abortion?”

“Sure! I am pro-choice. I don’t think abortion is really great, but I think the decision should be left up to the mother.”

“Do you think any decisions are wrong?”

“Of course,” he said matter-of-factly, “I’m not a relativist.”

“I guess so, if you are willing to say that we are treating whales badly.”

“True. So, I assume that you work for this organization, right?”

“Yes, we are here to create dialogue about abortion, to have conversations like the one we are having.”

“So what is your main argument against abortion?”

“My main argument is that a fetus has the same right to continue living that you and I enjoy.”

“But how can you say that about something that doesn’t even have a brain?”

“Great question! Let me ask you this: do you believe that all of us

born people here on campus deserve equal rights, or equal treatment?”

“Yes, of course.”

“I agree with you, but what is it that is the same about all of us that would demand we all be treated equally? On *what* do you base your argument for equality?”

He was silent for a couple of minutes. I mean literally—it was two minutes. I resisted the temptation to interrupt him because I could tell he was thinking hard on the question. I glanced at my student to see if he was following along. We bit



Discussing abortion with a Colorado State University Student

our tongues and continued to wait. What he said next was profound.

“I guess equality is based on the fact that we are all living and all human.”

“Isn’t that living and human as well?” I pointed at the picture of an eight-week-old embryo on our exhibit. Greenpeace was silent for a few seconds, thinking it over.

“Yes, it is living and human. That is a good argument that I have not thought about before.”

Greenpeace had to leave at this point, but before he did he thanked me for the conversation, and we exchanged proper introductions. His real name was Mark.

I admit that when I saw the Greenpeace tee-shirt I was not expecting such a reasonable conversation. I was impressed by Mark’s honesty and thoughtfulness. Once again I was reminded that we should never make assumptions about people. I was encouraged that people like Mark are out there, ready to talk and think about serious issues. I was also glad that Mark found the case for equality to be compelling.

The Equal Rights Argument as I used above



works well in conversation. One reason is that most people agree that humans are more valuable than animals. If that is true, then something like having a brain can not be the thing that make us all equal, because animals have brains as well but we are still more valuable. Mark was smart enough to think through those issues, and accurately distilled it down. Because he already believed that humans are more valuable, being living humans is the only thing he could find that makes us equal to each other, yet still more valuable than animals.

I want to encourage you to start a conversation about abortion, and see if you can present the equal rights argument in a non-argumentative way. I have given you an example above. If you reread the conversation, you will see that I asked questions, listened, and found common ground. We call these the Three Essential Skills for having a good conversation. You will find that practicing the Three Essential Skills will transform a debate into a dialogue.

Thank you for your prayers and support!
God bless,

Jacob Burow



Our Summer interns have arrived! Above are pictures of some of them doing outreach at Wichita State University. During their five weeks here, we will be honing their skills as mentors and speakers. We have four seminars upcoming that they will be leading in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. Please pray for them as they go through this experience! On the left, C.K. and Joanna engage a student in conversation. On the right, Katie and Hannah talk to a WSU student.