



WEST

Update from Jacob Burow - June 2014



“I know that the fetus is biologically human, and I know that it is a person like us; I just think that a woman’s right to do what she wants with her body trumps the fetus’s right to life. I am working on a minor in Women’s and Ethnic Studies (WEST), and I really care about women’s rights not being trampled.”

I met Jeanine during a JFA outreach event at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs in April, and she was defending the legality of abortion by making a *bodily rights argument*. Bodily rights arguments come in various forms, so it is important to clarify people’s views to find out what they mean. It sounded like Jeanine meant that a woman can do anything she wants with anything inside of her body, that her body is her sovereign zone. (Credit to Trent Horn for distinguishing the *Sovereign Zone view from other types of bodily rights arguments.)

“I agree that we should not be trampling on women’s rights,” I said, “but I’m curious how extreme you think those rights are? For example, the drug thalidomide was once used by some doctors in England to help relieve pregnant women

from morning sickness. A big side effect was that it deformed babies. Many were born with no arms or legs. If a woman has the right to do anything she wants with her body, shouldn’t she have the right to take thalidomide, even if she knows it will harm her baby?”

“No, she should not do that if she is going to keep the baby. I’m mainly concerned about a woman who was raped and did not choose to be pregnant. Her rights were violated, and she should not be forced to go through with the pregnancy.”



Now I understood Jeanine’s view better; it wasn’t a sovereign zone view after all. She was not saying that a woman can do anything she wants with anything inside her body. Instead she was saying that a woman should not be obligated to stay hooked up to a fetus if

she did not consent to being pregnant. This is what we call a **Right-To-Refuse argument. The argument is that a person should not be obligated to use her body as life support for someone else. For example if someone’s kidneys are failing and a doctor wants to hook you up to that person so you can filter his blood, you should not be forced to com-

ply. While this argument may hold true for kidney failure, I don't think it holds true in the case of abortion. Here is what I said to Jeanine.

“Imagine a new mom wakes up one day trapped in a cabin. She is snowed in and can't get out, and someone else's baby is trapped in the cabin with her. She finds a note saying that she will be there for six weeks and that there is plenty of food, water, and heat for her. She is so distressed about her own baby not being there that she wonders if she'll be able to care for this strange child who is trapped in the cabin with her. The only way she can feed the baby is to breastfeed it. But she did not choose to be there with this dependent child. Jeanine, do you think she would be doing something wrong if she chose not to feed the baby?” (*Credit to Steve Wagner and the philosophy team who created this analogy.*)

“Of course,” Jeanine responded, “she should take care of the baby, just like I think women should not get abortions. But we can't force her legally to feed the baby if she did not choose to have someone dependent on her like that! It is the same with abortion, if she did not choose to be pregnant, she can't be forced to care for the fetus.”

“Jeanine, I agree that she should take care of the baby. It seems, though, that surgical abortion is not merely a lack of care for the fetus, but actually dismembering it. Do you think the woman trapped in the cabin should have the legal right to dismember the baby just because she did not consent to care for

it?”

She thought hard about what I had said. “Wow, I had not thought about it like that. Thanks for taking time to talk to me. I guess I really just needed someone to walk me through the arguments logically.”

It is rare that a conversation goes this well with someone in a program like WEST. I have the highest regard for Jeanine's willingness to think reasonably and follow the best arguments where they lead. I wish everyone could be intellectually honest enough to change her mind on the spot.

Thank you for your support that makes it possible for me to train pro-life people to have conversations that change hearts about abortion.

In Christ,



For more on responding to bodily rights arguments, see:

* Sovereign Zone:

www.jfaweb.org/AutumnSZ.

** Right-to-Refuse:

www.jfaweb.org/DFG.