



# Their Best Arguments

Update from Jacob Burow September 2010

JUSTICE  
FOR ALL

After talking to people about abortion for over nine years, I have a pretty good handle on the arguments on both sides. I rarely encounter an argument I haven't heard on campus before, and I've also studied the best pro-choice arguments to know how to respond to them. That caused me a problem recently, one I have spent some time evaluating after the fact. Here is what happened.

I was standing at our exhibit in Pasadena California, watching people nearby, looking for an opportunity for a conversation. A well-dressed man stopped



right beside me to read the signs. I casually asked him what he thought about abortion, (as casually as that question can be) and he responded that he was in favor of it. I asked why, looking for more information about what he believed. He was not too sure, so I 'helped' him a little, asking what he thought about some of the most common pro-choice arguments. I spent about five minutes asking him questions, and helping clarify his

position on abortion. After I had pinned down that his basic position was in favor of a woman's bodily rights over the baby's rights, I said, "Well, let me share why I think that argument breaks down."

He held up a hand. **"I don't want to hear it," he said abruptly and walked off.** I stood there for several minutes thinking, "What did I say wrong?"

My conclusion is this: People don't like other people just playing chess with them. People don't like being maneuvered in a conversation in a way that they feel you don't care about them, that you simply want to win an argument. What's interesting is that I've been telling people this for years, but I think I violated my own rule in this conversation.

I had done many good things, like shaking his hand, introducing myself, and asking questions. **What I did next though, was attempt to take a shortcut in order to avoid a long conversation.** I know that abortion discussions can get off on rabbit trails, and that if I can get to the core issues and solve those, it saves a lot of time. I directed the conversation so I could address the most convincing pro-choice argument, because I know if I undermine that, other questions about abortion are easier to answer.

And he knew it. I'm sure he sensed as I purposefully brought up the bodily rights argument, that I only brought it up because I had a good answer for it, which was true. I —————→

put him in a bad position. Since he really did not know how to defend the pro-choice side, by agreeing with the arguments I brought up, it's as if he put himself in a walled fortress. Then, realizing that the attack was still coming, he did not know from where or how to defend against it. All he knew was that I was setting him up for the fall. When I started to answer all the arguments I had just brought up, he felt that the hammer was coming down. And it was. Though I did not intend it to be that way, that is in fact what I was doing. Not wanting to submit himself to public humiliation, he bowed out of the conversation. I can't blame him.

What could I have done differently?

Here's my advice: Be careful when you feed people the best arguments for their position on abortion. This can be helpful to some people, especially those who say they have not made up their mind. But this gentleman was different. He was strongly pro-choice, just unfamiliar with the arguments.

If I could have this conversation again, I would start by asking something related to what he had said. Since he brought up "choice," I might ask, "Do you think all choices should be legal?" I might point out how the choice of abortion ignores the choice and rights of the unborn. I'm almost certain he would have disagreed with me, explaining that in this case choice is different because the unborn is not fully human. Then we could

have continued the conversation from there. The key? Allow him to tell about his view (even if it takes more time) and asking him questions about it instead of saving time by laying out both sides of the argument for him without checking first to see if that would be helpful to him.

I don't pretend to know exactly why he left our conversation, nor do I pretend to know what words might have produced a good conversation. People are complex, he might have been on a tight schedule and just decided to end the conversation abruptly. He might have had some emotional reasons for not wanting to talk, I really don't know. **But I think that regardless his reasons for stopping the conversation, my attitude needed fixing.** I saw him as a project to be fixed, not a human to be understood, and I wanted a quick solution.

This situation was a good reminder to me that even after nine years of conversations I am still learning. Hopefully you can learn something from my mistakes and have more productive conversations as you stand up for the unborn.

*Jacob Burrow*

