

Justice For All Exhibit @ PCC
Reflection Paper
June 2009
By: **Kelly Roberts**

I would be lying if I said that nothing could have prepared me for my day volunteering at the Justice For All (JFA) Exhibit a few weeks ago...I left feeling felt stretched emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually. However, I also walked away from Pasadena City College knowing that in many ways, the past two years of my life had been preparing me for this experience.



After finishing my second year at Biola enrolled in the [Torrey Honors Institute](#), I am familiar with the Socratic method of education. I was very excited that JFA emphasizes dialogue over debate, since learning how to dialogue well has been a key point in my education at Biola.

Being a JFA volunteer provided a real-life exercise with the Socratic method on an issue I feel very passionate about. Rarely have I used this method outside of the classroom, and certainly never with strangers. However, once I got past the initial nervousness of starting a conversation, I found that I was usually adequately prepared to dialogue. In doing so, I found that listening well to a person was my greatest tool; this put me in a better position to ask questions.

Some of these questions caused the person to reconsider their view or forced them to carry a view to its logical and sometimes wicked conclusion. Most people do not seriously consider their view until they are asked hard questions of it. In dialoguing, I found the conversations to be both enjoyable and fruitful.

I was also fascinated to find that what a person thinks about abortion is almost always a reflection of the rest of their worldview. In three conversations the persons I spoke with had such a low view of man that abortion did not seem unethical (though none of them really had much regard for ethics either).

Since I am a philosophy major, getting to the root of the matter is always interesting to me. One student I spoke with gave me an economic explanation for why some people must die due to limited resources. In this view, it does not matter whether humans have value or not, since the procurement of adequate resources for the society matters most.

Another view one student held was that even if the unborn are human, no such thing as right or wrong exists; therefore, abortion cannot be called a "wrong" action. She took this viewpoint to its extreme in the course of our discussion, "biting the bullet" and not allowing for any law, moral absolute, truth, love, or God to exist. The conversation was both depressing and frustrating for me.

The third way to dismiss the unborn after acknowledging their humanity is to make the distinction between humans and persons. This view takes some quality or qualities (sense perception, memory, thought) and makes them essential characteristics in defining personhood.

Rarely have I used this method outside of the classroom, and certainly never with strangers.

A person who thinks this way may believe that it is wrong to kill persons, but then they define who qualifies as a person and who does not. This is one of the more commonly held views, and often people do not realize that they hold it. When people say that the fetus can't feel yet, has no brainwaves, is too small, etc., they are implicitly defining who gets to be a person and who does not.

Fortunately for what JFA does, most people intuitively agree that it is wrong to kill human beings; this is probably why the biggest task of the exhibit lies in re-humanizing the

unborn. Few can accept the logical consequences of holding a worldview that says otherwise.

One of the most important things I learned in these conversations throughout the day was how to respect and care about others while they speak about their beliefs. This was challenge for me since some people's views are vile and appalling.

...what a person thinks about abortion is almost always a reflection of the rest of their worldview.

Regardless, I found that in order to be effective, I needed to almost distance myself from what I believed in order to better listen to what the other person said. This allowed me to set aside some of my passions about the issue so that it would not cloud me from critically thinking about the other person's view.

Furthermore, valuing the unborn means we must also value the born, even those whose opinions and actions irritate or disgust us. I found that my listening, body language, and the manner in which I spoke communicated what I thought about other person.

There was one young woman I spoke with who I sat next to and mostly just listened to, who I think just really needed a listening ear. I can't really describe the interaction, but I think she was trying to sort through more than just the abortion issue. She was confused about life, and I had the opportunity to listen to her and encourage her in a way I might not otherwise had been able had I not cared about her as a person.

In contrast, I think the one conversation that I considered to go poorly was caused by a failure in nonverbal communication. The young man seemed to not respect me much from the start, and I began to reciprocate the dislike after listening to the wickedness and absurdity of his opinions. Even though that was probably the longest and most intellectually difficult conversations of the day, I also think it was the least effective due to this failure.

Furthermore, I was struck by how many people I spoke with were late to something because of our conversations. Sarah, a young woman who I connected with very well interpersonally, willingly missed a meeting with

her teacher just to keep talking with me. At the end of our conversation, I offered to exchange emails, but she offered her phone number instead!

She came to the exhibit being pro-choice, and left being pro-life but wanting more information. Another very good conversation I had abruptly ended by the young man looking at his watch and saying "Oh shoot I'm late for class!" Yet another, a young woman, was willingly ten minutes late to class.

I mention this because, to me, this trend reflected the overall import of the abortion issue. People are willing to be late because the abortion issue asks deeper questions, like "what is it to be human?" and "why are humans valuable?" These questions apply to both the unborn and the born alike. They are questions to which people want answers, or else they have



already come up with answers with which they are not sat

Dialoguing about abortion creates a unique opportunity to touch on these more fundamental issues, since a person's worldview creates the implicit basis for their stance on abortion.

Finally, I left Pasadena City College with a high degree of respect for all the staff and interns who make Justice For All happen. I cannot imagine how physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally exhausting your work is.

At the same time, your labor is not in vain but produces good fruit. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity be a part of that by volunteering at the exhibit, and I look forward to participating next year.