



Dear Friend,

When I'm on a college campus with the Justice For All Exhibit, one of the challenges I regularly face is trying to convince passersby to stop and have a conversation.

On the first day of our Georgia Tech outreach in mid-March, I decided to try something different. A young man named Garin walked by the JFA Exhibit, and I asked him if he had an opinion about abortion. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "Not really." As he kept walking, I called out after him, "Do you have an opinion about racism? Do you think racism is wrong?" He was by this time about thirty feet away from me. He stopped, turned around, and said, "Yes."

Tim: Me too. Do you think sexism is wrong?

Garin: Yes.

Tim: I agree with you. Why do you think racism and sexism are wrong?

Garin: [walking back towards me] I'm not sure.

Tim: I think racism is wrong because it takes a surface difference, like skin color, and treats it like it's more significant than the fundamental thing we have in common: that we're all human. It's the same thing with sexism. When a man says women are inferior to men, he is disregarding the fundamental similarity between them, that they are both human.

Garin: Yeah, I think I agree with that.

Tim: I've been trying to make sense of this really weird fact about the world. Could we agree that at least all of the people outside the womb in Atlanta deserve equal treatment, that we all have equal rights regarding basic things like the right to life?

Garin: Of course.

Tim: It seems obvious that that's true, but it's pretty weird if you think about it. I mean, think about how different we all are. Some of us are really big, others are pretty skinny. Some of us are tall, others are short. Some of the people on this campus are probably smarter than the two of us, others probably less so. If we're all so different in so many ways, how could we justify demanding that we treat each other equally? It seems like there must be something that we all have in common that demands equal treatment, and it must be something we all have equally. Could we agree on that?



During a lengthy tour of the Exhibit, I explained the various panels to a Georgia Tech student named Nikhil while my dad and other volunteers observed.



Garin: Yes, and the obvious answer is that we're all human.

Tim: Yeah, I think that's the best answer. We all have humanness in common, or a human nature. And if that's true, then anything that has a human nature deserves the same protection that you and I have. Do you think the unborn is human?

Garin: [pointing at one of the pictures on the Exhibit] Well it's obviously human. I guess I never thought about it that way.



We recently began to incorporate the Equal Rights Argument into our regular *Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue* seminar. In this picture I'm teaching the argument at a recent seminar at First Baptist Church of Woodstock.

After discussing some of the common reasons people have abortions, Garin gave me permission to explain the different panels of the Exhibit to him. After thinking about our conversation and looking at pictures that showed the results of abortion, he said he had a lot to think about, but definitely wasn't okay with abortion. He knew that in order to make sense of his certainty that people deserved to be treated equally, there must be something we have in common to explain that. If a human nature is what we have in common that gives us our equal rights, and the unborn has that same human nature, then the unborn deserves the same protection we deserve.

There are many excellent arguments for the pro-life view, but the Equal Rights Argument is one of the most powerful that I have ever used. I have had many conversations where I obviously had the stronger argument but for some reason the person was unconvinced. This argument's greatest strength is its ability to connect with people and persuade them. I have only been using it for about six months, and surprisingly often I hear, "Wow, that is a really interesting point; I've never thought about it like that before," or "I think you're right; I guess humanness is what makes us valuable." I have even heard a few adamantly pro-choice people admit that it's one of the best arguments they've ever heard and that they have no response to it.

We spend a great deal of time at Justice For All talking about the importance of finding common ground in a conversation in which there is disagreement. We try to create an atmosphere where there can be both grace and truth, where we can have a productive dialogue instead of a mere debate. You can make progress, even if all you do is

refute the other person's arguments against the value of the unborn; but you can stop their argument in its tracks by also providing a good reason to believe as you do. And if you argue for it from one of their own deeply held beliefs, like the importance of equal treatment, you are much more likely to persuade them.

You may be wondering, "But what if they don't give up so easily? What if they insist that it is not humanness that gives us our value, but rather some other property that you and I have equally but that the unborn doesn't have at all?" It's true; not everyone is as accommodating as Garin. In my experience, most people argue for an alternative theory that has to do with some sort of thinking ability. You may have even heard people say that the unborn isn't a person because it isn't conscious, self-aware, thinking, rational, or something else along these lines. Truth be told, these kinds of arguments used to scare me, because at face value they are not absurd. Although they appear more difficult on the surface, they typically have a particular flaw that is easy to expose. In a future letter, I'll explain.

Further Study

If you'd like to learn more about how to use common ground in conversations about abortion, I highly recommend my colleague Stephen Wagner's book *Common Ground Without Compromise*. Go to www.commongroundbook.com for more information, including a free eBook version.

In Christ,
Tim

P.S. Steve Wagner credits J. P. Moreland with the specific way we at JFA have framed the Equal Rights Argument.