

This article first appeared at the Equal Rights Institute blog.



Pro-Lifers Aren't "Forcing" Women to Stay Pregnant

By Timothy Brahm

Pro-choice advocates constantly describe the intentions of pro-lifers with the word "force." "Pro-lifers want to force women to stay pregnant, force them to have babies, force them to go through pregnancy, force them to be a parent." All of these statements are common, and all of them are false.

The word force implies a threat. It implies violence. It implies aggression. It's a tragic irony given that the aggression, violence, and threatening behavior doesn't come from pro-lifers, it comes from doctors killing babies.

The pro-life position is simple: you don't get to kill people, very young embryos are people, so you don't get to kill embryos. It's very straightforward.

It is true that by saying "don't kill the embryo," **other things naturally follow from that**, such as "go through pregnancy, give birth, and either raise the child or give him to someone else who will." **But that isn't the same as forcing someone to do these things.**

If it sounds to you like I'm just playing semantical games, consider the following case:

Molly has a five-year-old son with special needs named Jason. The father isn't in the picture. Molly doesn't want to have to deal with the difficulty of raising her son anymore. She wants to be able to go out and party and travel and have more of a social life. She comes up with a plan to kill Jason and have it appear that he died of natural causes. Molly confides in her friend Debbie about her plan. When Debbie objects that it would be immoral for Molly to kill her son, Molly fires back,

Molly: So you're saying that you want to force me to raise a child? You want to force me to take care of a disabled child against my will? You want to force me to be a parent? You want to force me to have a hard life? You want to force me to not finish my degree? You want to force me to give up my dreams?

Debbie: No, I'm not saying any of that. Just give him up for adoption or something.

Molly: So you want to force me to give him up for adoption? You'd force me to go through something that emotionally difficult? You'd force me to always wonder where he is and feel guilty for leaving him? And you'd

still force me to be a genetic parent. What kind of a friend are you?

It is misleading, intentionally or unintentionally, to respond to someone saying "don't kill a child" by saying "you're forcing me to do something."

Debbie didn't force Molly to become a parent, Molly is already a parent. Being opposed to a parent murdering their already existing child is very different than forcing someone who doesn't have an existing child to cause a new child to come into existence. This is part of the way this rhetoric is cheating. It draws upon the obvious wrongness of rape, forced marriages, or other circumstances where one is forced to be a parent against their will. It uses ambiguous phrasing that subconsciously draws to mind those obviously wrong things and tries to pretend that they are morally comparable to the abortion debate. I think many pro-choice people that use this language aren't conscious of these unfair comparisons, but the unfair comparisons are there, and it's part of why this language has so much rhetorical force.

I often tell pro-choice people in my conversations, "If we had the technology to

'Star Trek' beam the child into an artificial womb environment that it could survive in, I would be fine with the woman walking away and never having contact with the child again. I'm not trying to control women or punish them for having sex or anything like that. I just don't want her to kill the kid, and unfortunately, when a woman is pregnant with a kid, there are only two options. Either she kills the kid, or she goes through pregnancy and the child lives (obviously the child may also die unintentionally in a miscarriage)."

Saying "don't kill" has consequences. For Molly, it means a difficult life. For women who are considering abortion, it means any number of tough things, like dropping out of college, the pain of childbirth, the pain of placing a child for adoption or the hardship of raising a child. But the person who says "killing is wrong" is not forcing these consequences on her any more than a person who says "bank robbery is wrong" forces someone to be in poverty.

The abortion debate is very complicated. This article is not attempting to respond to bodily autonomy arguments or address every aspect of feminism and how it relates to abortion. My concern, for the moment, is with misleading language and how it affects people's minds.

In some misleading sense, it's true that Debbie is forcing Molly to be a parent, have a difficult life, etc. It's close enough to an accurate statement that it's understandable how someone would think that phrasing fits and then become attached to it. In the same way, it's kind of true that pro-lifers are forcing women to be parents, but only in the same misleading way. Even a pro-choice person should agree with me that it is misleading to say that Debbie is forcing Molly to be a parent, and if it is misleading language in that case, then it is misleading in the case of pro-lifers and abortion.

Podcast Update



If you haven't subscribed to our public podcast yet on iTunes, you should! Here are some of our most downloaded episode titles from the last quarter:

- > Q&A Session with Rock for Life Activists - Part 2
- > FULL COURSE PODCAST: Listener Mail - Questions About Confirmation Bias
- > Abortion Images: A Case for Disagreement without Division

Personal Note to Josh's Friends and Supporters

A few months ago I spoke at an awesome church in Charlotte that has been leading a nine week adult Sunday school class through our Equipped for Life Course. I spoke on the first day of the series and I'm speaking twice more in the coming months. It's been really cool to help the leaders of the class prepare for the course as well as getting their feedback while the class is in progress.

After a speaking trip to North Dakota I went back to training new team members and assessing other potential team members. It has been really exciting to see ERI grow and increase the things we're doing, and see really positive increases in virtually every analytic that we measure. We are helping more and more people to have gracious and productive dialogues, and I'm thrilled about that!

On a more personal note, we've had some great times as a family in the last few months. For example, my dad did a bunch of research and found a nice park for us all to meet up in South Carolina to watch the solar eclipse. That was a really great day.

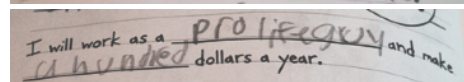
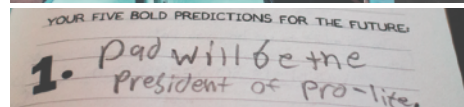
While I've been playing keyboards at my new church for a while, I noticed that they needed drummers more badly than keyboardists. After

passing my audition I played drums for two back-to-back Sunday services. It had been a long time since I'd played drums so I had to work really hard, going to the church at night to practice since I don't have a kit at home. While it was pretty taxing on my body, it was also a lot of fun. It was a real challenge to get myself to the level that I wanted to be at, and I'm proud of what I accomplished. It was also a great way to serve my new church family.

A few days ago I got back from spending some time in Colorado witnessing to two of my agnostic friends, who had invited me and a few of their other friends who are Christians for intellectual reasons and not just because of "blind faith." They wanted us to try to convince them that it's reasonable to put their faith in Jesus. We spent at least 12 out of 36 hours discussing theology, so it was really intense but it was also a fantastic thing to be a part of!

Thank you so much for your prayers and financial support.

Warmly,
~ Josh



Top: Playing the drums in church for the first time in nine years.

The bottom two pictures are from a children's book Noah got for his birthday asking him questions about himself. We noticed that he was thinking very carefully about his answers while he was filling it out. Later we discovered that he predicted that I will one day be the "President of pro-life" (I guess the whole movement?) and that when he grows up he will work as a "pro-life guy." I think the little guy's proud of me. (And really pessimistic about pro-life salaries.)