

No contest

Art of argument requires original thought and an open mind



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I enjoy a good mental challenge. I like to think about problems that I can't solve, and to pluck weird thoughts from as far as my mind can reach.

I've done a lot of things at this university in order to give myself that challenge, like taking philosophy classes and becoming an opinion columnist. A symptom of undertaking such challenges is that one is exposed to a lot of arguments.

I don't mean arguments in the sense of a logical progression of hypotheses and conclusions... just a lot of people arguing with each other.

Some people would try to tell me that this is the highest form of mental challenge. They call it an "exchange of ideas" in a very rever-

ent tone. I may have only been around for 22 years, but I'm old enough to know better than that.

That's because most of the time when people begin to argue, they start deluding themselves. Argument seems to lead to an inflated sense of self-importance.

I believe most people normally recognize that they are just one of 6 billion people on the planet trying to find food, love and shelter, just like all the rest. But catch most of them in an argument, and all of a sudden they seem to think they grasp the Earth in their palm and must defend it with their words.

Another notion is that by engaging in argument, you experience lots of new ideas.

Bull.
For too many people, you could automatically supplant the word "argument," with "reiteration of a patent viewpoint."

It can be embarrassing to listen to someone proudly spouting what they believe is an astute point, when it's actually something rather simple that's been voiced repeatedly for years.

Even if someone does touch on something uncommon, with few exceptions, the person will feel the

need to restate the point as many ways as he or she can possibly conjure. It becomes his or her "Wonderdress." (You can wear it in hundreds of different styles!)

People believe time stands still during an argument, as well. They seem to think that no matter how long they drag out their contentions, if they eventually make their point it will really be as if they didn't just fill a gaping hole in time with their verbal waste.

This may be why stories and films about lawyers remain so inexplicably popular. (Oh please, John Grisham, write another!)

People have an infatuation with argument, and lawyers are the knights in shining armor of discourse. Their entire objective is to drag out the argument until they win. And (gasp) they get paid disgusting amounts of money to do it!

The reason I like lawyers (at least in the context of this column) is I believe that, because arguing is their job, they are some of the few people in the world who have a realistic view of their own arguments.

They know when their words are total bunk, and they've read enough court cases to realize when an argument is stale. They're aware when

their droning has long trampled out its welcome because they've done it with the purpose of wearing down the opposition or confusing a jury.

And unlike most of us, they have a real reason to argue. It's their job.

To be fair, people like those in my ethics class and those writing in this paper are pretty much forced to argue. It is, I suppose, one of the many things we are here to learn.

And I wouldn't claim to be better at it than everyone else. I would admit, conversely, that I actively avoid argument. It's not because I never have opinions. Sometimes there are just better things to do than shouting them out.

Nevertheless, that has become a very popular activity. And it seems like a lot of us weigh the merit of writers or speakers by how much they can tick people off.

But evoking emotion is not the same thing as being insightful.

So the next time you're bent on arguing about something, try doing it constructively for once.

It's easy - and human - to ride the adrenaline rush of angry debate. But to realize its futility and to try something more constructive puts you on a higher plane.

Really listen to the arguments of

a person whose viewpoint you oppose, then try to make the argument for them. (I know for a lot of people, this is kind of like yanking out fingernails.) Then take it one step further and write both your and their viewpoints down.

Practical? No. Fun? Probably not. But you might learn some things.

Finally, if you really must argue with someone, please realize that you are arguing *with someone*. That means tailor your argument so it means something to your opposition.

How many times have you heard, for instance, a Christian arguing an issue with a person they know to be a nonbeliever or atheist, yet still supporting his or her argument by quoting the Bible?

How dense is that? In these cases, the validity of the Bible is irrelevant. If someone holds the Bible in no esteem, why would they ever value it as a source?

You need to find another way to argue your side. Otherwise, what you're saying just sounds like so much crap to your audience.

And you could just as well go home and try to convert your Teletubby doll.

Insult to injury

Father of girl in teen-sex lawsuit deserves punishment



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I feel very sorry for Leanne Detmer.

If you don't know that name, perhaps you'll recall the teen-sex lawsuit that garnered national attention, drawing the likes of Court TV and the major networks to Lincoln a couple weeks ago.

The lawsuit and the national media frenzy may be over now, following Judge Jeffrey Cheuvront's dismissal of the suit as "frivolous," but Leanne's injuries will last for a long time to come.

Leanne's father, Doug Detmer, filed a lawsuit against Dawn Bixler, the mother of Dallas Mills, the 16-year-old boy who had sex with 16-year-old Leanne some 15 or 20 times before she finally got pregnant.

Doug Detmer, through his attorney Kirk Wolgamott, alleged in his lawsuit that Dawn Bixler had a duty to act to prevent his daughter from being impregnated by Mills.

The suit drew national attention because it was thought to be the first of its kind in the United States.

Why do you think it was the first of its kind?

Perhaps it was because no one had ever been as stupid as Doug and Sharon Detmer. Not only did they bring a patently frivolous and outrageous lawsuit, but they did irreparable harm to their own daughter in the process.

The Detmers alleged that it was the boy's mother who had a duty to prevent the pregnancy. They said Dawn Bixler knew Leanne and Dallas were having sex, so she should have prevented the pregnancy.

Somewhat their reasoning managed to discount the fact that Leanne and Dallas had sex in not only the home of Dawn Bixler, but in their home as well.

The Detmers also ignored the fact that they seemed to have knowledge of the teen-agers' sexual activity as well. Sharon Detmer admitted to asking Leanne whether she was having sex with Dallas in an interview with the "Today" show.

The Detmers also thought that Dallas Mills was a drug user and disapproved of the relationship on that basis.

So why the hell didn't they put the brakes on their daughter's relationship with Dallas then? Did they think it was OK to allow her to have an alleged drug-using boyfriend? That's the first injury to their daughter.

After the Detmers learned Leanne was pregnant, they forced her to get an abortion. That's injury No. 2.

To add insult to injury, they brought the frivolous lawsuit that brought this whole sordid mess into the national limelight.

Now Leanne Detmer has to live with the details of her private sex life, abortion, counseling, and abusive father having been exposed to public scrutiny, not only to her friends, neighbors and relatives right here in Lincoln, but to the entire nation.

Did the Detmers ignore the fact that their daughter was already having problems with depression and taking medication for anxiety attacks when they made the decision to go public with the details of their daughter's sex life?

Did the Detmers think that recovering the cost of the abortion and counseling - \$11,371 - was somehow more important than protecting the privacy and dignity of their daughter?

I checked the Polk's Lincoln City Directory to see what Doug and Sharon Detmer did for a living. Unfortunately, the *Daily Nebraskan* doesn't have a current copy, the most recent available here in the office being the 1994 edition.

The 1994 Polk's Lincoln City Directory lists Doug Detmer as a laborer at Goodyear. It lists Sharon as a paraeducator with Lincoln Public Schools.

Goodyear employees make fairly decent money. LPS paraeducators don't make a lot, but combined with

an income from working at Goodyear, I would imagine the Detmers made enough to live comfortably.

I tried to determine what Dawn Bixler did for a living, but I wasn't able to find out. Maybe she had a lot of money, or at least more than the Detmers. I don't know.

Regardless of who had how much money, I can't imagine myself ever exposing any child of mine to that kind of humiliation. It would make no difference to me if I found myself in the Detmer's situation and I were unemployed with millions of dollars in debt looming over me. I still wouldn't do it.

Not for money.
Would I do it for the principle of the matter?

To do that, I would have to believe that the principle outweighed the privacy concerns of my child.

I could never make the scales tip in favor of principle over the privacy of a child of mine. Not the privacy of a client, either.

In dismissing the lawsuit, Judge Cheuvront said, "I hope that the primary basis for this case was not to profit in some way from convincing some gullible media organization that the pregnancy of a 16-year-old girl brought about by a 16-year-old boy is somehow unique. I can assure the world it is not."

Did Doug and Sharon Detmer think?

What's wrong with these people?

If there was a villain here, it had to have been Doug Detmer.

Not Dallas Mills.

Not Dawn Bixler.

Not Leanne Detmer.

Doug Detmer. He's your villain. He's the only conceivable defendant in any lawsuit arising out of this set of facts.

That's because he's the one who brought the lawsuit in the first place.

He's the one that hurt his own daughter.

And it wasn't the first time he hurt her. She told counselors that he had threatened to kill her and that he had physically abused her.



MELANIE FALK/DN