

THE POPULAR
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
APOLOGETICS

ED HINDSON
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HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

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THE POPULAR ENCYCLOPEDIA OF APOLOGETICS

Copyright © 2008 by Ed Hindson and Ergun Caner

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The popular encyclopedia of apologetics / Ed Hindson and Ergun Caner, general editors.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7369-2084-1

ISBN-10: 0-7369-2084-6

1. Apologetics—Encyclopedias. I. Hindson, Edward E. II. Caner, Ergun Mehmet.

BT1103.P67 2008

239.03—dc22

2007048411

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Printed in the United States of America

08 09 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 /LB-NI/ 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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ABORTION

ABORTION IS THE PREMATURE TERMINATION of a pregnancy. While the term can refer to a natural termination, such as a miscarriage, it is used almost exclusively to refer to an intentional termination. Perhaps no other issue is as controversial or as divisive today as is abortion. For evangelicals, it is literally a matter of life and death. Therefore, we will examine the legal standing of abortion, the moral arguments for and against it, and what Scripture says about it.

THE LEGAL STANDING

In *Roe v. Wade* (1973) the U.S. Supreme Court ruled (7-2) that a Texas law outlawing abortion was unconstitutional because it violated a woman's right to privacy. In striking down the Texas law, the Supreme Court, in essence, struck down all other state laws prohibiting abortion. In this landmark decision the court said the following: First, states could not restrict abortion during the first two trimesters (six months) of pregnancy, except for normal procedural guidelines. This meant a woman could have an abortion for any reason during the first six months. Second, in the last trimester, the state has a right, *but no obligation*, to restrict abortions to only those cases in which the mother's health is in jeopardy.

On the same day the *Roe* ruling was announced, the court also made public its ruling on another abortion case, *Doe v. Bolton*, which broadened the meaning of "health of the mother in jeopardy" to include "all factors—physical, emotional, psychological, familial, and the woman's age—relevant to the well-being of the patient. All these factors relate to health." This made abortion on demand legal for the entire nine months of pregnancy. The impact of *Roe* and *Doe* together made null and void every state restriction regarding abortion and allowed abortion on demand for the entire nine months to any woman who requested it.

These two cases became the legal standard for abortion in the United States.

Over the past several years, pro-life advocates have concentrated on regulating abortion, mostly on the state level. Most of these have been regulations concerning minors needing parental notification, restrictions over state funds being used to finance nontherapeutic abortions, and restrictions over certain types of abortions, such as late-term and partial-birth abortions. In October 2003, the U.S. Congress passed a federal ban on partial-birth abortions. Signed into law by President Bush, the ban was immediately challenged and made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, where it was upheld as constitutional in April 2007.

Even with the recent victories achieved by the pro-life movement, abortion on demand is still available in most parts of the country for any reason, including sex selection, birth control, pregnancies out of wedlock, and eugenic purposes, such as bone marrow transplants.

MORAL ARGUMENTS

There are generally three positions taken on the morality of abortion. The *pro-abortion* position (also known as the pro-choice view) holds that it is always or almost always morally permissible for a woman to have an abortion. Opposite that is the *pro-life* view (also known as the anti-abortion view), which holds that it is always or almost always immoral for a woman to have an abortion. Finally there is a *moderate* view, which holds that abortion is usually not morally permissible, but under certain circumstances can regretfully be permitted. There are a wide variety of moderate views: allowing abortion in cases in which the mother's life or health is in jeopardy, in cases of rape or incest, in cases in which the child is extremely deformed, and others.

Pro-abortion Arguments

Three major arguments for the pro-abortion view are the privacy argument, the quality of life argument, and the nonpersonhood argument. The *privacy argument* was essentially the moral and legal basis behind the *Roe* decision.

This argument states that all persons have an absolute right to privacy concerning what they do with their body. This argument is based on the principle of respect for autonomy, which includes a basic right to keep things private and personal if one wants to do so. It is argued that the areas in which a woman has a right to privacy certainly includes her reproductive right—that is, her right to bear children. Those who argue from a pro-life position, while not denying the basic right to privacy, question the absoluteness of this right.

The *quality of life argument* basically holds that if a child is deformed, defective, or might suffer in some serious manner throughout its life, it should not be forced to endure a less-than-quality existence. This is argued on different levels: some argue on the basis of the child's suffering itself, others on the burden that such a child might place on the family.

Finally, the *nonpersonhood argument* challenges the claim above by saying that the duty to do no harm applies only to persons. The unborn fetus, especially during the first and second trimesters, has allegedly not attained the status of being a person. Therefore, the duty to do no harm does not apply to the fetus. One must give this argument the credit for hitting the nail on the head—this is the *main issue* in the abortion debate. If the fetus is a person, then whatever reason is given to justify the taking of its life should also be applicable to any adult person as well.

Pro-life Arguments

For most who hold the pro-life position, the main issue is the moral status of the unborn. This is called the *personhood argument*. It is almost universally recognized that we have a moral obligation to do no harm to innocent persons without just cause. Since an unborn is a person, we cannot take its life without just cause. The primary question then becomes this: Is the unborn a person? If not, then when does the unborn achieve the status of person with the full moral rights we accord to all persons? Does this status apply from the moment of conception, or is it at some later time?

To answer this we must first make a couple of important distinctions. The first is between a human organism, which is a biological concept, and a human person, which is a psychological/philosophical concept. No one debates that the human organism comes into existence at the moment of conception. However, many pro-abortion advocates will argue that while a human organism exists, it is not yet a human person. They then conclude that, because the duty to do no harm refers only to persons, one can take the life of the unborn without violating this duty.

The second distinction concerns the definition of *person*. Most pro-abortion proponents employ a *functionalistic* definition of personhood. According to this definition a person is a being that functions according to a certain set of criteria (self-consciousness, ability to communicate, ability to reason, ability to respond to the outside world, etc.). If a being is not functioning according to these criteria, then it is not a person. When an unborn cannot function in these ways, it is not a person.

There are several problems with a functionalistic definition of personhood—the primary one being that anytime one is not functioning as a person, one is not a person. Apply this principle to an adult who is in a deep, dreamless sleep, in a coma, or under anesthesia. In such cases, the person is not currently functioning as a person. Yet we would not kill this adult in such circumstances, would we?

This brings us to the second way to define *person*: an *essentialistic* definition. According to this definition a person is a living being who has the essential capacity for rational reflection, emotional expression, willful direction, and moral deliberation concerning himself/herself and the world around him/her. *Essential capacity* means a capability that exists by nature of the kind of being the person is—whether or not such a capacity is ever actualized. All human organisms have this basic inherent capacity for personhood by nature of being human.

The significant question now is this: When does this essential capacity for personhood come into existence? There are three basic

positions. First is the *agnostic* position: Those who hold to this say, “We don’t know.” Perhaps they have not been convinced by any arguments, pro or con, and want to withhold judgment on when personhood comes into being. However, this would mean they could not affirm abortion as justifiable because they acknowledge that the unborn could be a person, and therefore it should be granted the benefit of the doubt.

A second position is the *gradualist*, which holds that there is no one moment when a person comes into existence. It is a gradual process of *coming* into existence. In the beginning (conception) there is no real person, and by the end (birth), there is a real person. The unborn develops *into* a person who gains moral rights as it develops. However, things either exist or they do not. There is no such concept of something “becoming” into existence. What *exists* may develop, but there is no such thing as something that “partially exists.” Development concerns *functioning as* a person, not *being* a person. As we develop we function better as persons, but that doesn’t mean we are more of a person than we were earlier in life.

A third position is a group of theories called *decisive moment theories*. These theories all hold there is a certain point in the life of the unborn when it attains personhood (i.e., the essential capacity is present). Most pro-life proponents recognize that *conception* is the only valid explanation of the beginning of human existence. Two things (sperm/egg) become one (zygote). It is not a fertilized egg, for the egg ceases its existence at the moment of fertilization. A new being comes into existence at this point. Second, this is a separate individual with its own genetic code that has come into existence, needing only food, water, shelter and oxygen—the same necessities needed by a full-grown adult. It is not just a clump of cells but is a fully integrated, self-developing organism. Third, the embryo is a *being* with a human nature, including personhood, who is in the process of *becoming* or developing in accordance with that nature. He is *essentially* a human person. That is why he develops as

a person from the moment of conception. If the unborn is a person from the moment of conception, then one cannot take his life without just cause. Such a cause would have to be one that can apply to any other person regardless of age.

SCRIPTURE AND ABORTION

What does Scripture say about abortion? It may surprise some to realize the Bible is not specific on this issue. Many pro-abortionists take this as tacit permission for abortion. However, it is wrong to take this approach. If that were the correct method of handling Scripture, then one could argue that pedophilia is permissible because Scripture does not address it specifically. However, we might ask *why* Scripture does not address abortion. This may stem from the fact that the very idea of abortion was contrary to the ancient Jewish view of having children. Children were seen as a blessing. In fact, for a woman to be barren was often interpreted as a curse from God and something to be lamented. Therefore, it should not surprise us to find nothing in Scripture specifically addressing abortion.

However, we do find scriptural comments about killing innocent persons. The most obvious is the fifth commandment: “Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13 KJV). What is it about murder that makes it so wrong? The scriptural answer has nothing to do with society and, surprisingly, nothing to do with the murdered person. Murder is something done to God. It is an affront on His image. We see this affirmed in Genesis 9:6: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, *for God made man in his own image*” (ESV). The fact that man is made in the image of God gives him a unique status in comparison to all else that was created. There are no biblical restrictions as to the killing of animals in any general sense. Because of man’s privileged position he may not kill any other man. To do so is to desecrate the image of God. While there has been some speculation on what this image actually is, it seems clear that the image is found in man’s personhood. This is what separates man from

all the other creatures on Earth. As persons we are bearers of the image of God, and we are obligated to respect that image.

Christian philosopher Scott Rae (p. 122) suggests that the best approach is “equating the unborn child in the womb with a child or adult out of the womb.” He suggests the following argument:

1. God attributes the same characteristics to the unborn as to an adult person.
2. Therefore God considers the unborn a person.
3. Abortion is killing an innocent person.
4. Killing innocent persons violates the fifth commandment (Exodus 20:13).

What are some characteristics of persons that God attributes to the unborn? First, the same terms are used to speak of the unborn (Luke 1:41,44) as used to speak of a child or baby who is already born (Luke 2:12,16). Second, the same punishments are meted out for injuring or killing the unborn (Exodus 21:22-25) as for injuring or killing an adult (Leviticus 24:19-20). Third, an unborn is considered sinful from the moment of conception (Psalm 51:5), just as an adult is said to be sinful (Romans 3:23). Fourth, God claims to have knowledge of the unborn in a personal way, using personal pronouns to refer to them (Psalm 139:15-16; Jeremiah 1:5) just as He uses in regard to other persons. Fifth, God calls the unborn to their vocation (Isaiah 49:1) in the same way he calls other persons (Amos 7:14-15).

THE FINAL QUESTION

In looking at the personhood argument and considering what Scripture teaches, it seems Christians have many good reasons to believe that an unborn is a person from conception. The final question, then, is this: Where does one go from here? There are two responses a Christian can offer. One is to withdraw into the church community and let the non-Christian world go its own way. The other is to be actively involved in the abortion issue within the public

arena. This second response is called activism, and there are good reasons to believe it is the more appropriate response. Christians should have a voice in the public, sharing what they believe to be true. In fact, if they really believe abortion is wrong, one could argue that they have an obligation to share that conviction with others.

However there are two kinds of activists: hard activists and soft activists. Hard activists will use any means to achieve their purpose. They will work both inside and outside the law, if necessary. This is incorrect. Tactically, it is ultimately ineffective and damages the cause of Christ. Especially deplorable are acts of violence against any person in the name of pro-life activism. In a democratic pluralistic society we should, as much as we can, respect laws that are arrived at in a fair and equitable manner.

Thus, soft activism should be encouraged. Soft activism involves working within the law and respecting others by reasoning with them and encouraging appropriate legislative activity. Christians should dialogue with others and attempt to change laws they believe are bad. The laws permitting abortion in this country certainly fall under the category of bad laws. As Christians, we should actively and respectfully attempt to change those laws. Christian supporters of the pro-life position have good reasons to support their view and need to aggressively and respectfully share those reasons with those who disagree.

MARK FOREMAN

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ADOPTIONISM

THE TERM *ADOPTIONISM* refers to a Christian heresy that can be traced back to as early as the second century, but was not promoted strongly until the eighth century by Spanish bishop Elipandus of Toledo. Adoptionism is a belief that Jesus was born human and became divine later in His life. Adoptionists teach that God tested Jesus while on this earth. After Jesus passed the test, and upon His baptism, He was given supernatural powers and was adopted as the Son of God. This belief clearly teaches that Jesus earned the title Christ as a result of His perfect devotion to the plan of God. Simply put, adoptionism is the belief that Jesus was in nature a man who later in life became God by adoption.

Adoptionism first appeared in the second century and was quickly condemned as a heresy. Popular with Gnosticism, adoptionism was one of two predominantly held views concerning the nature of Jesus. The orthodox belief was that Jesus pre-existed as the divine Word (see John 1:1).

Though adoptionism was quickly seen as a heresy and rejected, it has resurfaced throughout history. The second movement of adoptionism came in the eighth century and was led by Elipandus, the bishop of Toledo, and by Felix, the bishop of Urgell. These two men continued to influence people to embrace the teaching that Jesus was a man who, after being tested and found virtuous, was adopted by God into the Godhead.

Adoptionists are quick to point out that the Gospel of Mark does not include in his writings an account of the birth of Jesus. The person who subscribes to the adoptionist view will insist that Mark had no interest in making a case for Jesus being eternal in nature. But the

fact that Mark does not include the birth of Jesus in his Gospel doesn't deny the truth of Jesus' divine nature. What is very interesting is that nothing Mark wrote directly contradicts what John wrote in his Gospel about the divine nature of Jesus. Omission is not evidence that contradicts the truth that Jesus and God are indeed one.

Another text adoptionists point to is 2 Samuel 7:13-14, which states, "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son" (NKJV). The adoptionist position is that God will indeed call the future Messiah His Son, but that will not happen until the throne and the house are built first. To the adoptionist this is clear evidence that the Messiah would not be adopted as a Son until he is ready to rule.

The New Testament writers made the connection between this verse and the person and nature of Jesus. In fact, three claims that Jesus made of Himself have roots in 2 Samuel 7:13-14. First, Jesus claimed he would build a temple (cf. Matthew 26:61; Mark 14:58; John 2:19-22). Second, Jesus claimed to have an eternal throne (cf. Matthew 19:28-29). Finally, he claimed to have an imperishable kingdom (cf. Luke 22:29-30; John 18:36). When taking into consideration the entirety of Scripture, the adoptionist position on 2 Samuel 7:13-14 has no real credibility.

The lack of scriptural support for the adoptionist position is just the beginning of the problems of this heresy. Not only do the adoptionists lack scripture to positively support their propositions, but they also have beliefs that directly contradict the teachings of the Bible. One such belief is that Jesus is not co-equal with God. Adoptionism *denies* the essential *deity* of Christ. John 1:1 gives clear testimony as to the nature of Jesus when it states: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." For John, it was abundantly clear that Jesus was not God's adopted Son, but that Jesus was God in the flesh (John 1:12-14). Even Jesus Himself gave clear and

compelling testimony as to His identity. In John 10:30 Jesus stated, “I and My Father are one” (NKJV).

Another problem with adoptionism is that it denies the *pre-existence* of Christ. In denying the incarnation, the adoptionist also must face a sobering assertion—Jesus Christ was *created*. Therefore, though He would be everlasting, He would not be eternal. The adoptionist position is that Jesus was born as a man. They believed that Jesus lived a virtuous, sinless life on earth and was rewarded for His devotion by adoption. According to this view, Jesus lived as a mere human for at least the first 30 years of His life.

In modern culture, such groups as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Mormons have embraced adoptionistic teachings to varying degrees. Both systems present Jesus Christ as an exalted man of extreme devotion, but not the incarnate Son of God. Interestingly, Islam presents Jesus in the same light: He is an anointed teacher, yes, but not God in the flesh, and certainly not the second person of the Trinity. The battle over this early church heresy should serve as a warning for the modern students of the Bible. Heresy never dies; it just puts on another dress.

WILL LANGFORD

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AGNOSTICISM

THE TERM *AGNOSTICISM* comes from two Greek words: the Greek *a*, meaning “without,” and *gnosis*, meaning “knowledge.” Agnosticism is a philosophy that views the truth claims

that deal with the metaphysical realm—such as theology, the existence of God, and eternity—as unknown or unknowable because man is subjective. Agnostics claim it is either impossible to have absolute knowledge of God or, though it may be possible, it is rarely probable because each person has experiences that color their understanding.

The term *agnostic* was introduced in 1869 by Thomas Huxley to describe his system of belief that rejected absolute truth. In his book *Man’s Place in Nature*, Huxley believed that man was incapable of coming to spiritual knowledge. This is not to say that people did not believe that spiritual knowledge existed or that God(s) did not exist. It was Huxley’s belief that it was simply impossible to judge whether a belief is true or not.

For the agnostic, it is arrogance for someone to claim the possession of absolute truth, and thus all statements of truth that pertain to God and eternity should fall into the category of belief or feeling. It is unwise to categorize the agnostic as ignorant, especially if the agnostic genuinely seeks truth. Intellectually, the agnostic does not believe in the categories that bring one to a belief in the truth claims of Jesus Christ. The agnostic sees the landscape of creeds—such as those of Islam and Christianity—as mutually exclusive and contradictory. Ultimately, he sees these truth claims as incomprehensible—thus, man cannot understand a concept so illusive and improvable as God.

In a letter to Charles Kingsley, written on September 23, 1860, Huxley stated, “I neither affirm nor deny the immortality of man. I see no reason for believing it but on the other hand I have no means of disproving it” (Huxley, *Collective Essays*, 237-239). Agnostics such as Huxley believe it is intellectually dishonest to state emphatically that you believe something to be true when it cannot be proven by science or ascertained by reason.

CURRENT FORMS OF AGNOSTICISM

In our current culture, agnosticism exists in three primary forms: (i) those who do not

believe in God and do not believe a god is necessary; (2) those who do not believe in God because a Supreme Being is not knowable; and (3) those who do believe in the possibility of a god, but do not see any need for that god.

In the first category we find those agnostics who believe man has progressed to such a degree that he no longer needs a belief in a higher power. This brand of agnosticism (called *evolutionary agnosticism*) views religious beliefs like an anthropologist. These agnostics reason that man needed religion when he could not explain the basic questions of existence. Once man progressed beyond superstition (their view of metaphysical belief), he simply abandoned his need for a “greater power” on which to blame his problems.

The second category of agnosticism can legitimately be called *skeptical agnosticism*. While these agnostics would not relegate religious thought to superstition, they would question the methodologies and evidences we offer. To the skeptical agnostics, proof demands more than logic or reasoning. They demand scientific proof, evidence beyond mere rational thought.

The final category of agnosticism, called *existential agnosticism*, views all religion and belief in existential terms. You may believe in a god, these agnostics would say, and there may be positive results from your adherence to that belief, but that is purely your truth. Because they have not seen this god and do not desire to do so, they would say, “I will simply file this into the category of the unknowable.”

EVANGELICAL APPROACHES

For the evangelical, combating agnosticism effectively depends entirely upon the brand of agnostic you encounter. The evolutionary agnostic will view your insistence on a personal and intimate God as a quaint vestige of the past. Attempting to offer logical proof in the work of God does not matter to the skeptical agnostic because he does not accept the conclusions you draw. The third brand of agnostic will have no problem accepting your

adherence to Christianity, but views all truth as absolutely subjective.

The primary issue in all three forms of intellectual agnosticism is their expectation of *proof*. In plain terms, they demand evidence for faith that they do not demand of any other arena. For example, the agnostic may scoff at belief in a God they cannot see, yet absolutely embrace the theory of global warming. Yet they have never touched, held, or seen the ozone layer. Why this inconsistency?

Scientists embrace the theory of global warming due to their belief in judicial evidence, not scientific proof. The scientific method is a strict, five-step technique. A hypothesis is presented, and a controlled experiment must illustrate a repeated result. This result must be “duplicatable”; otherwise, the thesis is discarded.

Yet science cannot prove global warming via scientific proof. The core thesis of global warming is that the earth and its atmosphere are historically getting warmer. This increase in the temperature, they allege, is endangering the polar ice caps, the ocean levels, and the very existence of life on the planet.

There is a fatal flaw in this proposal. Nothing in terms of *history* can be proven by the scientific method. The slow march of time defies the scientific method because one cannot go back in time to duplicate the result. Therefore, you are left resorting to *judicial* proof rather than scientific proof.

JUDICIAL PROOF

Judicial proof is the method by which any thesis that involves time must be proven. The guilt or innocence of a person accused of a crime must be determined using the three categories of judicial proof: (1) physical evidence, (2) oral testimony, and (3) written testimony. The scientist intent on proving his theory on global warming gathers data on temperatures at certain locations, measured in times past, and compares the data with current temperatures taken in those same places. The prosecutor intent on getting justice presents evidence from the scene of the crime as proof of the guilt of