



Special Reports

Summer 2001

Life Decisions International

vol. iv • no. 3

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

The Hindu View of Abortion

by Partap Singh Verma

We at Life Decisions International have strived to publish material that our supporters will find nowhere else. This issue of *Special Reports* certainly falls into that category. While it will surely be foreign to Christians, we believe it is interesting to make note of the thought processes of others. Moreover, it is important to realize that we are not alone. Abortion is *not* an issue that concerns Christians and no others.

We live in a society of opinions. It is opinions that shape our world and define who we are in relation to others. Yet, despite the declarations we make, we often confuse the difference between fact and opinion. Fact cannot be changed no matter what view is placed on it. Despite the inherent nature of a fact, many people still strive to change its properties by forcing their opinions in this rudimentary category.

People have strikingly different opinions on a matter that should have a universal understanding. The very foundation of this confusion stems from a lack of knowledge about the natures of matter and spirit, or put another way, about the difference between the material body and the actual self.

All of us understand the fact that we are conscious living beings and are observers of the perceivable world. We do not think about it much, but this world of observable things includes more than our external environment. Our own body, mind and intelligence are all included in this as well. This is seen when we perceive our body working, our mind observing mental images such as that of a dream and when we utilize our intelligence to make discriminations. As a result, we are aware of ourselves as both unique and individual persons. In all conditions of this life there is always someone within who is the observer.

The observer or a form of individual consciousness or awareness is the most fundamental element of our experience. Yet, no one in any of the various branches of modern science, psychology or philosophy can properly explain its essential nature and origin. This is because the very seat of conscious

life remains mysterious and inaccessible, even to the most gifted modern empiricists. At the same time, we should know that there must be a seat, or self, which exists at the core of our being. Otherwise who or what is doing all of this is observing?

Those who follow this line of thought will see that the inquest of abortion is not a moral question. Virtually everyone agrees it is immoral to take an innocent person's life. Some declare they have the right to kill their unborn baby, but this declared "right" does not change the fact that it is *immoral* to kill. Ownership is just justification for a process that is truly cruel in nature. What people do not agree on is just who or what a person is, so the question is one of knowledge.

What is life? What is its point of origin? When is a living thing considered a person? Whose life should be protected and when, if at any time, is it not? These are the questions that surround the abortion issue and they are questions of knowledge, not morality. But who can provide definitive answers to such questions? In most countries, the burden has been placed upon some court, national or regional legislatures. Unfortunately, just being appointed judge or elected legislator does not automatically endow one with the insight or wisdom to answer life's ultimate questions. One must dig deeper to find the answers to such an inquisition.

All material phenomena have a beginning and an end. One of the most prominent ideas of modern culture is that consciousness is another form of material phenomenon. Therefore, it is believed that consciousness (or the self) also ends with the death of the material body. This point of view, however, is merely an assumption. It has not been proven by any scientific observation or experiment. Nonetheless, the idea that the self ends with the body remains one of the great articles of faith of modern materialistic thought and many people have been taught to think of themselves in such terms. Yet few people have thought through the philosophical implications of this

type of thinking, which compels us to unconsciously embrace voidistic and nihilistic styles of life.

The most basic teaching of the Hindu-Vedic literature stands in direct opposition to the modern view of consciousness and life. According to Vedic teachings, individual consciousness is not dependent upon neurobiological functions, but permanently exists as an independent reality. The presence within the material body of a conscious observer, who remains ever present throughout changing bodily and mental states, indicates the existence of two energies—the spiritual energy (the conscious self) and the material energy (the temporary body). The Vedas explain that this spiritual energy, supported by consciousness, continues to exist even after the material body is finished. Consequently, the conclusion about the question of personhood is in fact clear. Since each of us is an eternal individual with a distinct identity, which is never been, is not now, and never will be dependent on the material body, or the laws that govern the phenomenal world, our personhood is a fact at conception.

According to the Vedic teaching, the soul enters the ovum upon fertilization. Thereafter, the child's senses develop within the mother's womb for the term of the pregnancy. Birth is just the appearance of the more developed human form. It is not the beginning of human life. That begins with fertilization. The personality did in fact exist before, so it is an act of cruel violence to end the life of such a person simply because that life is seen as an "inconvenience."

Inconvenience in itself is an interesting phenomenon in today's culture. Technology has allowed many of us to lead "successful" lives. It has allowed us to live more efficiently and in some cases longer, but its control over our conscious levels is manipulative. Abortion is clearly not a natural process and technology has been successful in blinding us from this pestilent act. We must distinguish between productive technology and when humans are controlled by it.

Humans are generally visual in nature. What we see and experience influences our thought process. If all abortions required some graphic procedure that included images of pain and suffering, perhaps many would not be so emphatic in their pro-abortion views. However, with the simple swallowing of a pill, we can successfully destroy life. Although the destruction may not be apparent, one must not make the mistake of thinking that the consequences of such actions will not occur. Many women who want to bear children later in life often cannot do so or have complications because of an earlier abortion. In other

cases, strong psychological effects follow such a process. Whatever the case may be the laws of material nature react heavily to this kind of ignorance or irresponsibility. The result is intense suffering—be it instantaneously or delayed. In Hindu belief, this can occur even over a number of lifetimes. For every action there is a reaction. Although we may not feel the direct results of our actions instantaneously, we should not make the mistake of thinking that nothing has occurred.

Many people who are generally against abortion feel compelled to justify it under certain circumstances. Some people propose circumstances such as rape as justification. But this kind of thinking leads to bad karma. Aborting a child conceived by rape is not some kind of good karma that erases the bad karma. It is more bad karma and it compounds the sin. Many of us are guilty of thinking that the universe revolves around us. This thinking leads to the idea that no matter what we do, we will always have control over our lives. But abortion does not allow for control. It creates ignorance and a failure to tackle the issue at hand.

Society has created various institutions that create alternatives for abortion. Many couples strive so hard just to conceive a baby, yet so many take this process for granted. Life is such an amazing gift, yet so many treat it as a simple biological reproductive process. It is clearly something more. We all have experienced birth in some form or another, and the smile of a baby is something that virtually all can agree is special. Yet why do we insist on questioning this thinking?

If life were a question without an answer, this attitude would be valid. But life is a question without an answer only for people who choose to remain in ignorance. But ignorance is no excuse for criminality. If I accidentally run over a child while backing up my car in the driveway, it is not a valid excuse to say, "Oh, I didn't know she was there." If you drive a car, you have a responsibility to check to see if there is a child behind you. Similarly, if you drive a human body, be prepared to assume the responsibilities of life as given to us by the Creator. This responsibility is not a question, but an answer to life.

Partap Singh Verma is president of the Hindu Students Council at the University of Maryland.

Special Reports, an official periodical of Life Decisions International (LDI), is published quarterly. Send changes of address to LDI at P.O. Box 75161, Washington, DC 20013-0161. Commentaries are designed to stimulate analytical thought. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of every member of LDI's Board of Directors, Board of Advisors, or staff. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.fightpp.org. This

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