

■ **THOUGHTS** | March 10, 2007

# Single-issue politics

What a candidate believes about abortion tells us how he will treat other issues  
| *Gene Edward Veith*



As the political season gears up again, many Christians zero in on where candidates stand on abortion. For this they often get criticized for being "single issue voters."

Aren't there other issues we should consider than just abortion? A particular political office may not even have anything to do with abortion. Might a pro-choice politician be worth voting for if he has good stands on other issues of more immediate relevance?

But voting on the basis of a single issue is perfectly legitimate. And abortion makes a good single issue. What a candidate believes about abortion tells us a great deal about him and how he will treat other issues.

A candidate's position on life issues reveals whether or not he is a moral relativist. Consider, for example, the politician who waxes eloquent about how he personally opposes abortion. But, he goes on to say, that is just his view. He feels he does not have the right to impose his belief on anyone else. Every woman should have the right to her own views. Therefore, abortion needs to be legal.

Notice what this candidate believes about morality. The moral realm is something that exists within his own head and the heads of other people. To him, a moral principle does not have the status of objective truth. To his way of thinking, morality is not a reality that transcends individuals, governments, and cultures, and according to which they must be judged.

But if morality is merely subjective, as this candidate believes, how can he plausibly believe in human rights? If there is no moral order above the state, how can anyone criticize the state? What would restrain this particular politician from committing tyranny?

We can learn more about our candidate's moral philosophy. He is likely to say, "I am not pro-abortion. I am pro-choice." This is a sign of the postmodernist. The assumption here is that we construct our own reality, including our moral reality, by our will.

If a woman chooses to have the baby, that is right for her. If a woman chooses to have an abortion, that is right for her. But there are no moral absolutes that apply for everyone.

Postmodernists generally apply this line of reasoning to every truth claim. They say there is no truth that is valid for everyone. We choose our own truths. Religion, too, is not a matter of what is true or false. People choose their religious beliefs according to what they want.

This means that everyone exists in their own self-contained universes of their own devising. Any universal or collective structures of meaning are simply impositions of power.

Postmodernists believe that cultural institutions are nothing more than power constructions. The group in power imposes its will on others. Government is thus inherently oppressive. A politician who is a postmodernist could thus be expected to govern oppressively.

Some politicians are anti-abortion. But they nevertheless support embryonic stem-cell research. They have become persuaded that destroying human embryos to "harvest" their stem cells is morally justified. This is because those cells could do so much good. Isn't killing babies of only a few cells in size worth it, they reason, if their stem cells could help cure diseases in adults?

These politicians may have pro-life records and even think they are still pro-life because they think stem-cell therapy can save lives or improve the quality of lives. But in their moral philosophy, they are utilitarians.

According to utilitarian ethics, something is good if it is useful. Instead of considering an issue in terms of objective moral truths—such as, "Thou shalt not kill"—utilitarians value what "works."

For utilitarians, the end literally justifies the means. In politics, this position has always been the philosophy of tyrants.

A candidate's position on this single issue also reveals whether a person is a strict constructionist when it comes to constitutional law or a judicial activist. It reveals assumptions about the nature of the family. It tells us whether he will protect the weak, the helpless, and the unwanted.

Abortion is the single issue that tells us about all the others.