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Camosy's "Beyond the abortion wars: A way forward for a new generation" (Book Review)

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Book Reviews



Camosy, C. C. (2016) *Beyond the abortion wars: A way forward for a new generation*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing. 207 pp. \$18.00. ISBN 9780802874689

In *Beyond the Abortion Wars*, Charles Camosy makes a gallant attempt at assisting both sides of America's abortion debate to abandon entrenched positions and re-engage in a meaningful discussion. Camosy is an ethicist and theologian on the faculty at Fordham University and engages the abortion debate from the position of an American Catholic moral tradition with a modernist perspective. Clearly Camosy is attempting to avoid bogging his book down with extensive philosophical analysis in order to make his position readable for the average high schooler and above.

His main thesis argues that the abortion war in America has developed into a binary argument that does not really reflect the actual position of most Americans. He convincingly argues that most Pro-Life advocates are only Pro-Life regarding abortion and frequently support non Pro-Life positions in areas such as war and capital punishment. He further argues that most Pro-Choice advocates are only Pro-Choice regarding abortion while willing to force others to pay taxes, accept legal opinions which may be reprehensible to them, and force the acceptance of majority opinions in many areas. Camosy does a good job of explaining how the "Constanza Strategy" of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a shift in America's political parties' views on abortion. Arguing that this strategy developed for political purposes polarizes American opinion regarding abortion for the benefit of politicians, while intentionally failing to address the underlying issues of women's rights and ignoring the unborn child's rights. The resulting situation forces Americans to accept one of two binary positions which benefits only politicians. Camosy reviews several studies which clearly show that most Americans favor some control on abortion and accept at least limited abortion – especially in cases where the mother's life is truly at risk. Since America's legal system fails to address American ambivalence in a meaningful way, Camosy attempts to develop a method by which the abortion debate can be politicized and legislated in ways that re-engage both sides.

Camosy expounds well the moral issues which surround an unborn child, eventually settling on an argument based on potentiality as best representing the child's claim to personhood. Despite accepting an unborn child's personhood, Camosy acknowledges that there are sometimes legal limits on personhood. An almost universally accepted example he uses well is self-defense against lethal threat, and he proceeds to argue that even most Pro-Life advocates would accept abortion to save the life of a pregnant woman. Camosy correctly points out that although sacrificing one's life for another is a laudable goal, it is not mandated. His argument lacks conviction regarding some of his examples based on thought experiments used by Pro-Choice advocates to force an uninvolved bystander to support the life of an unrelated person. His example of the violinist unknowingly attached to an innocent victim who finds himself required to spend nine months sustaining the life of this violinist fails to address the Augustinian ethical argument of proximity. Augustine basically argues that three degrees of proximity are involved in ethical decisions. These include proximity of genetic relationship, proximity of geographic position, and proximity as a causative agent in the situation. Camosy's argument regarding the violinist only addresses physical proximity while pregnancy usually involves all three degrees of proximity for a woman. Augustine's doctrine of proximity significantly impacts America through Emmanuel Levinas' influence on negligence law. Camosy's failure to address this aspect of the ethical debate, especially given his position as an academic Catholic ethicist, is a serious flaw in this otherwise valuable work.

Camosy finishes the book by laying out his proposal for a Mother and Prenatal Child Protection Act. Although Camosy does a good job of identifying many of the issues that lead to abortion and the inequality suffered by women who choose to be mothers, his proposal falls well short of anything that would actually solve the problem. As a mechanism to drive an honest debate forward, both Camosy's Mother and Prenatal Child Protection Act and this book are significant vehicles. As far as actually breaking the logjam of America's abortion "debate," I am much less optimistic.

Reviewer

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