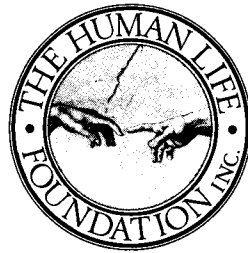


# the HUMAN LIFE REVIEW



WINTER 1996

*Featured in this issue:*

William Murchison on . . . . . Promises for Keeps  
Lori Brannigan Kelly on . . . The Terrible Cost of Testing  
Faith Abbott on . . . . . The Abortionist as Craftsman  
Ramesh Ponnuru on . . . . . Historians Aborting History

---

*Our Bodies, Our Souls: a Symposium*

Naomi Wolf • Marjorie Reiley Maguire • George McKenna  
William McGurn • Lynette Burrows • Rebecca Ryskind Teti  
• Ellen Wilson Fielding • Richard Brookhiser

---

Also in this issue:

Peggy Noonan • George F. Will • John Leo • Ray Kerrison • Mona  
Charen • Graham Walker • *Congressional Record* • Paul Greenberg  
Walker Percy • Eugene Narrett • Victoria Macdonald • Dominic Lawson  
& a Selection from *Good Children* by Lynette Burrows

*Published by:*

The Human Life Foundation, Inc.

New York, New York

Vol. XXII, No. 1

\$5.00 a copy

ABOUT THIS ISSUE . . .

. . . We greet 1996 with a bang: in this issue we bring you more pieces than ever before. But it's not really surprising: "our" abortion issue has been right smack in the public eye during the last months of '95, from essays published in mainstream journals, to the hearings on Capitol Hill on "partial-birth" abortions, to public debate over the role of the "pro-lifer" in the Republican party.

Once again we present a Symposium, this time on Naomi Wolf's article in *The New Republic*. Contributor George McKenna is the author of *On Abortion: A Lincolnian Position*, which first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in September of '95 and was reprinted in our *Fall* issue (copies of which are still available). Contributor Marjorie R. Maguire is a former member of Catholics for a Free Choice—for an interesting article about her break with that group, see "The Choices of Marjorie Maguire," in the July 23, 1995 *Our Sunday Visitor* (*Our Sunday Visitor*, 200 Noll Plaza, Huntington, IN 46750).

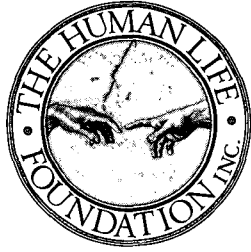
As we go to press, we note an essay which appeared on the Op-Ed page of the New York *Times* (December 29) headlined "Who Deserves to Be Born?" by one Steven D. Lavine who, the *Times* tells us, "studies law and bioethics at Yale Law School." Lavine reports that genetic testing is being used increasingly to abort the potentially handicapped or simply unwanted child. And sometimes it is health itself that is a death sentence: Lavine tells of a dwarf couple who wanted to abort a child of normal height, and a deaf couple who wished to abort a child of normal hearing. This information sadly complements Lori Brannigan Kelly's article (see page 13) in this issue on prenatal testing and its ramifications.

Speaking of the *Times*, as you will see from Walker Percy's letter (page 114), we *cannot* thank them for publishing it—as a matter of fact, the *Times* never printed *or* answered the letter from one of this century's most celebrated novelists.

We would like to thank *National Review* for permission to reprint Ramesh Ponnuru's article. Also of interest is Dr. Joel Brind's article on the abortion/breast cancer connection in *NR's* December, 25, 1995 issue. (For a copy, write *National Review* at 150 E. 35th St., New York, NY 10016.)

There are too many people to thank in this issue, but we would like to especially mention *The Spectator*, from which we have reprinted 12 unusual cartoons—we certainly enjoyed picking them out for you.

Maria McFadden  
Executive Editor



# the HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

Winter 1996

Vol. XXII, No. 1

*Editor*

J. P. McFadden

*Contributing Editors*

Faith Abbott

John Muggerridge

William Murchison

*Consulting Editor, Europe*

Mary Kenny, London

*Executive Editor*

Maria McFadden

*Managing Editor*

Anne Conlon

*Contributors*

Ellen Wilson Fielding

Elena Muller Garcia

James Hitchcock

Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn

William McGurn

Mary Meehan

Wesley J. Smith

John Wauck

Chilton Williamson, Jr.

*Articles Editor*

Robert M. Patrick

*Production Manager*

Ray Lopez

*Circulation Manager*

Esther Burke

*Publishing Consultant*

Edward A. Capano

*Introduction* . . . . . 2

J. P. McFadden

*Promises Are for Keeps* . . . . . 5

William Murchison

*The Faustian Cost of Prenatal Testing* . . . 13

Lori Brannigan Kelly

*The Abortionist as Craftsman* . . . . . 23

Faith Abbott

*Aborting History* . . . . . 35

Ramesh Ponnuru

*Symposium: Our Bodies, Our Souls* . . . 43

Naomi Wolf . . . . . 45

Marjorie Reiley Maguire . . . . . 60

George McKenna . . . . . 67

William McGurn . . . . . 71

Lynette Burrows . . . . . 75

Rebecca Ryskind Teti . . . . . 81

Ellen Wilson Fielding . . . . . 85

Richard Brookhiser . . . . . 90

*Appendices* . . . . . 93

Peggy Noonan

George F. Will

John Leo

Ray Kerrison

Mona Charen

Graham Walker

*Congressional Record*

Paul Greenberg

Walker Percy

Eugene Narrett

Victoria Macdonald

Dominic Lawson

Lynette Burrows

Published by THE HUMAN LIFE FOUNDATION, INC. Editorial Office, Room 840, 150 E. 35th St., New York, N.Y. 10016. The editors will consider all manuscripts submitted, but assume no responsibility for unsolicited material. Editorial and subscription inquiries, and requests for reprint permission, should be sent directly to the editorial office. Subscription price: \$20 per year; Canada and foreign \$25 (U.S. currency).

© 1996 by THE HUMAN LIFE FOUNDATION, INC., New York, N.Y. Printed in the U.S.A.

## INTRODUCTION

We begin the twenty-second year of this journal with more of a flurry than a flourish; we've never had so many different pieces (25 or, if you count this essay, a baker's two dozen), nor covered such a range of fact and opinion, as you will find in this issue. All quite fitting, we'd say: when we began in 1975 we were hardly alone in wondering whether it was possible to publish a good-sized quarterly based on the "single issue" of abortion. Our bet was that abortion was so fundamental to the moral state of the nation that it not only *could* be done but would also get easier to do—provided that we could make abortion "the issue that will not go away," as we confidently expected it *would* be. Modesty aside, that confidence was not misplaced. Nowadays it's hard for any "concerned" American to go more than a few days without hearing new dispatches from the many fronts of the Great Abortion War.

As we also expected, legalized abortion on demand has pricked the conscience of the nation on many other moral issues as well, some directly related (e.g., euthanasia), others obviously "parallel"—for instance, the state of matrimony: Can the sanctity of marriage survive the demise of the trade-mark Western belief in the sanctity of human life itself? As with illegitimacy, child abuse, and much more, the divorce rate has greatly worsened since the Supreme Court's "final solution" to abortion in 1973; only a most ardent pro-abortionist would contend that such "trends" are unrelated?

The good news is, a counter-ardor is on the march: call it the latest "religious revival" movement if you will, but the fact is that the Promise Keepers may well be "the fastest-spreading religious movement in the country," as William Murchison explains in our lead article. Perhaps the most impressive fact is that, although the organization is a mere post-toddler (it only got going in 1991), it is now routinely filling giant stadiums like the home of the Dallas Cowboys, which was jammed with 59,000 Promise Keepers last year. More amazing may be the fact that (as Murchison says) "The movement has gained extraordinary recognition in the mass media (who, whatever their philosophical disposition, can still smell a good story)"—it *is* a good story, and Mr. Murchison (as our regular readers know) is a master story-teller—a treat awaits you.

Then it's back to the sober subject of "prenatal testing" which, alas, has become all too closely "related" to abortion. Last year (in our Summer issue) we gave you the ennobling story of little Domenica Lawson who—despite having Down's syndrome—*was* born, which made her an exception to the now-prevailing

THE HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

rule, as Mrs. Lori Kelly acidly explains. Call it another amazing story: it's hard to believe that so many "researchers" in a profession pledged to "above all, do no harm" can be involved in devising programs to "screen out" (read *dispose* of) human subjects who fail the tests of perfection—certainly when the tests are both coldly arbitrary and amoral (at best!). But as Mrs. Kelly reminds us, there are indeed precedents, not least German ones that pre-date Hitler.

Next we return to very-current news: the hot controversy over the cold-blooded execution of "virtually born" babies *via* "partial birth" abortions—but we do it by an unusual route. Way back in our Spring, 1990, issue, we ran Faith Abbott's "The Abortionist as Craftsman"—we made it our lead article, because we thought it *news* that some abortionists actually gloried in doing "hard-case" terminations—indeed, we were disappointed that her article didn't produce some morally-outraged reactions. Better late than never: what Abbott was describing *then* is the same "procedure" that, its defenders *now* claim, is so "rare" it is used only to save a woman's life. But you'll know better after reading this "old" story of horrors that somehow went unnoticed Lo these many years (and don't miss Faith's *postscript*, in which you will find out what became of the Chief Craftsman).

As it happens, our final regular article is also reprinted (from *National Review*) but also timely, being a short history of what might be fairly described as the Big Lie about abortion in America. The author, Ramesh Ponnuru, is a young reporter who has obviously done his homework well, as veterans of the Abortion War will, we think, readily agree—we certainly learned much that we'd forgot.

Following that update, you will find our Symposium on Naomi Wolf's "Our Bodies, Our Souls"—the article caused a sensation when it first appeared last Fall, "surprising friend and foe alike"—indeed, Ms. Wolf says some surprising things, which we think demand serious attention. So we invited a baker's half-dozen writers to comment on them, which they did with considerable gusto; the result needs an introduction of its own, which you will find on page 43 below.

\* \* \* \* \*

We seem to have got carried away with our appendices this time as well—we've never run a (beg pardon!) baker's dozen before—but we'll be darned if you don't find every one of them well worth reading, beginning with Peggy Noonan's "stage-setter" commentary (*Appendix A*) on last year's Big Story—Gen. Colin Powell's *non*-run for president. Miss Noonan has it right: the key point was (What else?) abortion, about which, she says, the Republican Party learned lessons it *ought* to have learned long since, but clearly hasn't *yet*. As everybody knows, Miss Noonan gained fame as a speechwriter for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush (she's "credited" with the fateful "Read my lips . . ."); we'd say her secret is, she *understands* what she writes about—a dangerous talent if lent to speakers who *don't*, as poor Mr. Bush evidently didn't?

Noonan is followed by another well-known writer, Mr. George Will, who writes here (*Appendix B*) about "partial birth" abortions—having read Faith

## INTRODUCTION

Abbott's "old" article, you already know more about that "procedure" than most Americans who first read Will's column in *Newsweek*. There follow three more columnists—John Leo, Ray Kerrison, and Mona Charen—on the same grisly subject (*Appendices C, D & E*), before Professor Graham Walker (*Appendix F*) asks: "Why Stop at the Third Trimester?" Why indeed.

All this high-powered wrath came *after* the House of Representatives had banned such abortions by a lop-sided 288-139 floor vote: Why were our distinguished pundits still so exercised? Why, because they all find it hard to believe that *anybody* could defend "modern" barbarism (Mr. Kerrison is outraged by President Bill Clinton's vow to *veto* the ban). Yet it did have defenders in the Congress; their arguments are all available in the *Congressional Record*. However, on the assumption that most citizens never see that official account, we thought our readers might appreciate getting a small slice of it here. Accordingly, we've printed a section of the actual debate (*Appendix G*), including speeches from both sides, so you can get the "feel" of it all.

Next we journey to a confessional, so to speak: Mr. Paul Greenberg (*Appendix H*) was originally a supporter of *Roe v. Wade*, but as the abortion body-count multiplied into millions, he travelled what you might call a slow road to Damascus—ending up, to his own surprise, as the favorite editorialist of a "right-to-life" group. By the way, Greenberg gives a brief account of a letter written by the late great Novelist Walker Percy: in fact, there is more to the story. Mr. Percy was a longtime reader of this journal; one day he called, to suggest dinner (in Washington); we "hit it off" (Percy enjoyed puns) and became phone-friends; in late 1987 we suggested that he write the *New York Times*. Percy demurred: "They won't print it." Likely, we said, but we *will*—he laughed loudly, and agreed. It was a memorable letter: you will find it in *Appendix I*. At the time, we thought the real story was: Would the august *Times* refuse to print (or even *answer*) a letter from a celebrated writer—many consider Percy our finest modern novelist—if he wrote about abortion? The silence of the *Times* should have been *news*, but no other paper found it fit to print.

There is yet more: in *Appendix J*, Professor Eugene Narrett writes about the "pioneers" who were enthusiastic guinea pigs for the ballyhooed drug RU-486 (the "abortion pill"); *Appendix K* is a report from the London *Sunday Telegraph* on the perils of prenatal testing for Down's syndrome, followed by a column (*Appendix L*) by that paper's new Editor, Dominic Lawson, on the same subject (of course you already know Mr. Lawson from Lori Kelly's article). But even *this* issue must end somehow; given the heavy going we've put you through in the first 122 pages, we are pleased to leave you with a final treat: *Appendix M* is a chapter from the book *Good Children*, by the charming Mrs. Lynette Burrows (again), which provides the perfect ending for what is—we warned you—our most flurrious issue to date. With more to come, we hope, in due course.

J. P. MCFADDEN  
EDITOR

## Promises Are for Keeps

*William Murchison*

I am bound to acknowledge one thing at the outset: I wasn't there. I didn't see it with my own eyes. Thousands of men—men, let me underscore the word, given the bad rap people of the male persuasion commonly receive in “enlightened” circles—who were hugging, praising, praying. Quoting the Holy Bible—yes, the Bible—a book widely disfavored in those same “enlightened” circles. Vowing to serve, that most unfashionable of activities, so connotative of inferiority and second-class citizenship.

All this, in a football stadium. On Astroturf. Oh, irony most delicious! What is football—as viewed in “enlightened” circles—if not a 20th century version of the Roman gladiatorial matches: sweaty body meeting sweaty body in deadly combat, for no better purpose than the rank appeasement of the rank appetites of the culturally rank.

Here in this football stadium—Texas Stadium at Irving, Texas, to be exact: home of the Dallas Cowboys—59,000 men did exactly these things, and much more. They met as Promise Keepers—members, patrons, call them what you will, of possibly the fastest-spreading religious movement in the country; one steeped in scriptural orthodoxy and personal witness, rather than in political or sociological exploration.

I feel under less compulsion to explain Promise Keepers than would have been the case a year ago. The movement has gained extraordinary recognition in the mass media (who, whatever their philosophical disposition, can still smell a good story).

This story, as we know, concerns a nationally-celebrated football coach—Bill McCartney of the University of Colorado—who in 1990 vowed to fill his team's stadium with men, just men, honoring and praising and reverencing Jesus Christ, and seeking transformation through such an experience.

The first Promise Keepers conference was held the following year. Four thousand men filled UC's basketball arena. In just two more years their numbers had multiplied like the loaves and the fishes. Fifty thousand of them on this occasion, just as McCartney had hoped, jammed the football stadium. Next year the show went on the road. There were seven such occasions, attended by almost 300,000 men. In Denton, Texas, a college town north of Dallas, heavy thunderstorms disrupted the proceedings. Mostly

---

*William Murchison*, our contributing editor, is a nationally-syndicated columnist based at the *Dallas Morning News* and the author of *Reclaiming Morality in America* (Thomas Nelson Publishers).

WILLIAM MURCHISON

the men stayed in place—not unlike the dripping throngs at one of Pope John Paul II's masses last year in New Jersey. Something powerful was going on. To seek physical shelter would have been to abandon the spiritual shelter the great gathering afforded. I spoke with a protegee who had been there. What a wonderful, joyous experience! he affirmed. It was a joy to be wet in Jesus' name.

Now this was some powerful datum—the satisfaction of sacrifice. How very old-fashioned: a thing, you might say, out of the First Century A.D. Modern people do not behave this way. When moved to congregate, they prefer the creature comforts, such as a den or “media room,” the big-screen television relaying accounts of the proceedings, with commentary by earnest middle-aged men in blazers. On the buffet table, the aroma of fresh popcorn entices.

In 1995, in the face of cultural expectations like these, Promise Keepers drew 700,000 men to stadiums in 13 different cities: which was either more or fewer, depending on whose statistics you believe, than Louis Farrakhan attracted to Washington, D.C., for the Million Man March. In 1997, the statistical comparison with Farrakhan takes on real relevance. Promise Keepers plans in Washington a prayer and worship event. The anticipated attendance: 1 million.

But what for? To pray and praise, yes—but not in precisely the way associated with evangelistic gatherings in the 20th century.

The calls for rededication have a sharper point; the consequences of accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior are finely honed. The name “Promise Keepers” is not inadvertent. If you come to one of these events, and if the spirit gives you direction, you make specific undertakings. To wit:

1. To honor Christ “through worship, prayer, and obedience to His Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit.”
2. To pursue “vital relationships with a few other men . . .”
3. To practice “spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity.”
4. To build “strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values.”
5. To pray for pastors.
6. To demonstrate biblical unity by reaching across racial and denominational lines.
7. To obey the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

No inconsequential commitments, these. There is no question at Promise Keepers of softly singing “Kumbaya,” with lights dimmed and hearts aglow, then next day snarling at the kids, browbeating the wife, cutting out other drivers in traffic. Or worse.



Here is the truly riveting consideration: This stringency is what the Promise Keepers want. They hunger and thirst for it. They are not into heart-glow. Transformation is what they seek: utter and sweeping, bounded only by the limitations this mortal condition places on us all. Promise Keepers wants those who attend its events to become “godly influences in their world.”

How does this all play out in real life? By most accounts, it plays out in arresting, if not actually inspiring, ways.

The feature on which the media focus most is Promise No. 4—that which concerns the building of strong marriages and families. The point is a sensitive, not to say a critical, one in an age much given to sexual gratification. There is a minimum of clarity these days concerning the male-female relationship: legally, culturally, psychically, religiously. Sometimes a man doesn't know what to do. He knows to help with dishes and diapers. Hasn't modern feminism taught him as much? But how does this speak to his relationship with the woman to whom he is joined in holy wedlock? It can become deeply confusing: less so, however, to a man who attends Promise Keepers than to many others. Promise Keepers instructs him that the man must lead his family. But lead with love—the scriptural way. Lead with consideration. Lead with sensitivity and sacrifice.

The anecdotal evidence on performance is impressive. A woman at Texas Stadium said of her husband, who had attended a Promise Keepers gathering in Houston: “He's a better husband, a better father, a better everything.” In what ways? He's steadier; less likely to snap back. His own daughter can see the difference: “She's always been a real mamma's girl . . . But now she just can't wait for him to get home at night.”

William J. Mattox, in *The American Enterprise*, relates similar stories. “Before he went to Promise Keepers,” Mattox quotes one woman as saying of her husband, “I had filed for divorce—it was that bad. But something dramatic occurred—I sent a frog (to Promise Keepers) and got back a prince.”

Promise Keepers likewise seeks to be a force for racial reconciliation. How successfully? Journalistic accounts of Promise Keepers events refer to “mostly white” crowds, as if this were some sort of censure: white equals exclusivist equals irrelevant, navel-contemplating escapism. McCartney, for non-ideological reasons, is equally concerned about the white image of Promise Keepers. Evangelistically, he recruits among blacks and black churches. Nearly half the headline speakers at any given Promise Keepers event are black or Hispanic. In Dallas, numerous Promise

Keepers converged on 10 inner-city churches to help with painting or cleaning. If the great majority of Promise Keepers so far are white, that may attest merely to the reality of cultural differences noted in other aspects of life. But of course McCartney wishes to overleap those cultural differences, offering the gospel as our great civilizational cement. All that can be said with certainty is that he will continue his efforts.

As any fast-spreading, unsettling revolutionary movement will, Promise Keepers takes its share of brickbats. Gender feminists are deeply suspicious if not downright unkind concerning the organization's premises and *modus operandi*. Frequently they picket Promise Keepers gatherings, brandishing signs that say "Smart Women Don't Buy Your Promises."

All the Promise Keepers movement wants to do, alleged one Julie Gardner, of Red Oak, Texas, in a letter to the Dallas *Morning News*, is "cling to the age of discrimination and subjugation . . . I feel sorry for these people for continuing to be trapped in a social caste system with a tradition of treating women as chattel."

**L**et's see now. Your husband comes home from Promise Keepers, throws his arms around you, undertakes to seek your good while upholding your distinctive qualities—and that's chattel slavery. Interesting. It would be bracing to see what Julie Gardner had to say if your hubbie came home brandishing a bullwhip instead of carrying an armful of gladiolas. However, as we know from experience, facts only infrequently intrude between gender feminists and the truth.

The feminists are dismayed at the idea of casting the marital relationship in scriptural terms. After all, scripture is what that horrid white male St. Paul helped to write—Paul, with all his talk of wives obeying their husbands. What is obedience but subservience?, these analysts of the human condition ask us. Visions of the Victorian paterfamilias flit through their minds—father in smoking jacket and slippers, lounging by the fire-side; mother toiling behind the scenes to make the household run; bracing herself for the moment (Which Must Come) when her husband demands (never requests!) his conjugal rights. All these brutes at Promise Keeper rallies—surely they want no less! If modern women thought it seemly to swoon, these would certainly do so.

Promise Keepers, in its attempt to reinvigorate the idea of mutual commitment within the family, stumbles over heaps of modern cultural garbage like this. In too many modern arrangements, mutuality is a lost treasure, life a zero-sum game. There is a fixed quantity of satisfaction. Each partner who helps himself to some of it deprives the other. That the partners, working

together in mutual concern, might actually multiply the stock of satisfactions is a matter that rarely penetrates the feminist "consciousness." It penetrates McCartney's, and that of the Promise Keepers.

Being anterior to the modern consciousness, and thereby supposedly superseded, the biblical view of marriage is hard to explain. How can one lead without dominating? If there's a top, mustn't there be a bottom? These are among the great Christian paradoxes on which Promise Keepers seeks to put new flesh. Even the attempt to do so astounds.

Until it is remembered what disasters the new consciousness has produced or abetted: a 50 percent divorce rate; an illegitimacy rate of 30 percent and rising; astounding increases in criminality among the young; the general disappearance in society of generally accepted norms and standards. Promise Keepers has not emerged *in vacuo*.

Nor in solitude. The marriage-regeneration movement, which Promise Keepers represents with spectacular success, is not confined to Promise Keepers. Women now have their own group—Renaissance Ministries, founded in April, 1994, by Deborah Tyler, a former television news anchor living in Morristown, Tennessee. "We are like Promise Keepers," says Mrs. Tyler. "We make attempts to help women fulfill the role God has chosen."

For Renaissance's first conference, 500 women showed up. Four conferences are planned for 1996 in Dallas, Nashville, Little Rock, and Birmingham: good Southern cities, where the traditional understanding of the male-female relationship is stronger than up north. Mrs. Tyler likewise advises 12 churches in Tennessee and Texas.

More astonishingly, given the mother church's "progressive" views on gender questions, the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado may have launched a Promise Keepers-like movement. Bishop Jerry Winterrowd took 156 men on retreat to the YMCA of the Rockies Camp in Estes Park. Winterrowd said Promise Keepers had inspired the event. "I admired what they had done," he said, "and I thought, 'By god, we should have one.' Here we are, a mainline denomination, trying to learn from them, and we are not embarrassed to do that." If no string of promises binds the participants, at least the diocese encouraged them to reflect on their common condition—maleness. "Men need a place," said Bishop Winterrowd, "where they feel safe to talk about their faith, their needs, their struggles. And women are very supportive. I went to a women's event earlier this year, and they prayed for the success of the conference."

All this suggests that something more is going on in society than mass

hand-holding and blubbing around the Astroturf—something bracing, even counter-revolutionary.

The revolution that has shaken society to its foundations has been directed at the family. The foundation of the family is the relationship between husband and wife. Where husband and wife reverence and respect each other, everything else flows in profusion—fidelity to wedding promises; care and concern for children, unborn as well as born; mutual sacrifice, mutual giving. It happens now, as it has happened always—just not in the abundance we took for granted as short a time ago as, say, 1960. Not that marital life was perfect even then. Far from it. There was abuse in marriage, there was negligence, there was disregard of solemn undertakings and promises. Men were guilty; women were guilty.

There was not yet, even so, the kind of political, the kind of sociological assault on marriage that materialized in the 'Sixties and 'Seventies. If stony-hearted male patriarchs of the past have a fair amount for which to answer, so in all conscience do those of both sexes who have preached and practiced a gospel of self-expression and non-commitment within marriage.

In the 'Sixties, a time of decay and decline for supernatural religion, marriage came to assume an essentially civil character. It was all a legal contract! Party of the First Part promises to Party of the Second Part blah, blah, blah . . . The supernatural character of marriage—even when technically reinforced by a good old-fashioned church wedding—passed to a considerable extent from view. No wonder husband and wife found it logical to assume a condition of legal equality. Their union was a merely legal one. A legal contract concerns itself with who pays the bills, who does the housework, wipes the kids' noses, etc. A legal contract likewise exposes itself to continuing examination by the contracting parties. Not so much "Are *we* fulfilled?" as "Am *I* fulfilled?" No? Maybe . . . maybe . . . a severance of obligation is indicted. A "D-I-V-O-R-C-E," as Tammy Wynette has memorably put it.

What is wrong with this view? I mean, in purely practical terms. Leave theology out of it. A great deal must be wrong with it, to have occasioned the kind of backlash taking shape here at the end of the 'Nineties. The Promise Keepers, the Renaissance women are not inspired by the fluidity and shapelessness of modern promises. They are repelled. The legal-equality bit works only up to that point where marriage soars, or should, to another dimension: up above the soap suds and diapers and unpaid bills. Where two souls, not just two bodies or bank accounts engage each other—here the supernatural promises kick in. The promises grow ethereal: to

love, to cherish, to sacrifice. No court can enforce them. Conscience alone can enforce them—with some divine help.

The explicitly religious nature of Promise Keepers is its real strength. PK traffics in higher mysteries than do the courts—why this man and this woman are in love; what their love means in practical terms; to whom, or, rather to Whom, they are answerable for the success or failure of their marriage. There is no embarrassment on the Promise Keepers' part about any of this. What about a group whose members chant "We love Jesus, yes, we do. We love Jesus, how about you"? Hokey? Of course. But religious hoke beats secular hoke—at least in this context. The Promise Keepers center marriage, and the husband-wife relationship, upon religion. God Himself has done this wonderful thing, this joining of two lives. The Bible tells us so, as also 2,000 years of Christian witness. This means God has particular expectations regarding the performance of the marriage partners.

Such as? Well, as Mrs. Tyler, of Renaissance, puts it: "God wants man to be the head of the church and the heart of the family."

The grinding noise in the background proceeds from feminists doing arresting things with their teeth. This is what feminists hate about marriage based on supernatural principles—the un-modern flavor of the thing. They like legal equality far better. But if legal equality—everyone with just the same role, the same duties, the same responsibilities—were enough, there would be no Promise Keepers movement. This, because there would be no dependency over the consequences of regarding marriage as mainly a business of bed and board. The Promise Keepers see marriage as infinitely more than this. They sense a divine connection: marriage as the will of God, fulfilled in the lives of God's people, male and female, and lived out under "God's holy ordinance."

Once the religious dimension is acknowledged, all the squabbles over family headship do not so much fade into triviality as resolve themselves in a compelling way. The head of the family is the husband, Scripture instructs. Does that make him monarch? As much as anything else, it makes him servant, in the way that Christ, the head of the church, became the servant of all.

In the late 20th century, we are unaccustomed to dealing with theological paradox. It makes feminist anger at Promise Keepers more understandable. Legal, rather than spiritual, dignity is what Promise Keepers' hecklers and taunters chiefly know. Promise Keepers, one may hope, will strengthen and even rejuvenate the families of its members. But whatever Coach McCartney's game, his organization is doing something else of

WILLIAM MURCHISON

fundamental importance: reminding us that marriage is only superficially about bed and board. Marriage, so the Book of Common Prayer reminds us in words that once were central to every wedding ceremony, was instituted by God. Marriage signifies the mystical union between Christ and his church. Those who God—God himself—has joined together, no man is to put asunder. Back toward this half-forgotten, this wholly critical understanding we creep—scraping our knees on the Astroturf.



*'Have you been going through my mail?'*

THE SPECTATOR 28 January 1995

12/WINTER 1996

# The Faustian Cost of Prenatal Testing

Lori Brannigan Kelly

So far as I know, this century's first "cost-based" proposal for the selective killing of "worthless" humans appeared in a monograph published in Leipzig, Germany, in 1920—more than a dozen years before Adolph Hitler came to power. In an essay entitled *Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life*, Dr. Karl Binding wrote:

Since they require extensive care, they occasion the development of a profession devoted to providing years and decades of care for absolutely valueless lives. . . . Again, I find no grounds, legally, socially, ethically or religiously—for not permitting the killing of these people, who are the fearsome counter image of true humanity.<sup>1</sup>

On June 1, 1995, Domenica Lawson was born in England with Down's syndrome. The fact that Domenica was born at all is significant, because, on both sides of the Atlantic, the 75-year-old brainchild of Dr. Binding is also alive and well. Indeed, it is being applied to "valueless" lives at the earliest possible point—*in utero*. A special prenatal-screening process is now widely available to expectant parents; it can detect many if not all genetic abnormalities in the fetus during the first few months of pregnancy. If such abnormalities are found, it is now "normal" for the would-have-been parents to have the defective fetus aborted. Needless to add, such "selective" abortions, including those based solely on the baby's gender, are perfectly legal in both the U.S. and Britain.

Little Domenica beat the odds; she was not aborted. But her birth ignited an often-bitter debate on the high cost of "unworthy" life. Her father is Dominic Lawson, a professed atheist who was then the editor of *The Spectator*, a highly-respected weekly opinion journal (it was England's 1995 Magazine of the Year—Lawson has since become editor of *The Sunday Telegraph*). He wrote an article celebrating Domenica's arrival and his abhorrence of the British health system's policy of providing "gratis, an abortion, if their tests show that the mother is expecting a Down's baby." (The article was reprinted in the Summer, 1995, issue of this journal.)

Lawson's story caused a great deal of comment, and many letters, some of which were printed in *The Spectator*. One, from a woman with severe spina bifida, thanked Lawson, adding ". . . occasionally there are reports of doctors who starve to death born babies with my degree of disability

---

Lori Brannigan Kelly is a free-lance writer (and mother of three) who now lives in Massachusetts; she was a White House staffer during the Reagan Administration.

because they think we are 'better off dead'. . . in recognising [Domenica's] infinite value and worth you also recognised mine." A parent of a 23-year-old Down's man wrote poignantly of ". . . this extraordinary syndrome which deletes anger and malice, replacing them with humour, thoughtfulness and devotion to friend and family." She lovingly described her son, and others like him, as "stars in an increasingly materialistic world."<sup>2</sup>

But praise was by no means all Lawson got back. In a column headlined "A Duty to Choose Unselfishly" Claire Rayner of *The Independent* castigated the Lawsons for refusing prenatal tests—the burden of their decision and the "misery" of Domenica's life would now have to be shared by society. The Lawsons, wrote Rayner, would ultimately not be "paying the full price of their choice."<sup>3</sup>

Rayner's gratuitous indignation is typical of the "climate of cost-effectiveness" that surrounds the use of prenatal testing. Ostensibly, testing is intended to relieve parental fears about the viability and well-being of their unborn child, and to provide them—and their doctors—with advance information that could be of vital importance. But in practice such information is being used to pressure parents into the "choice" of abortion. Thus, if a fetus is found to be of poor biological or genetic quality, the infant itself is increasingly looked upon as having a *negative* economic and social net worth, since the estimated costs of its sustained care over the course of a lifetime are obviously far greater than the costs of aborting it. For screening programs to be cost-effective and useful for the entire population, proponents like Rayner argue, couples must use the information they receive to *avoid*—through abortion—the birth of a genetically-diseased infant.<sup>4</sup>

As prenatal technology increasingly makes possible a cost-efficient "thinning of the ranks," what will the future hold for children with congenital abnormalities? What impact will the pre-birth elimination of such individuals have on society? And, most importantly, what price do we pay when our focus on balancing the bottom line virtually ignores the sanctity of human life itself? Here in the U.S., where annual health-care costs now exceed 14% of the gross domestic product, the continuing debate is focused on ways and means to at least cut the steady *growth* of medical expenses. There is mounting pressure to ration treatment (it is already happening in Oregon) by cost-benefit analyses; in short, to spend our shrinking resources only on the *curable*. In such a strictly-utilitarian economy, unborn babies judged to be Incurable are easy targets.

Cost-benefit analysis is one thing when used for making decisions about the allocations of scarce or limited resources, but quite another when divorced from moral or political guidance and direction. It is true that, in



today's economically-oriented society, cost-benefit analysis is inevitable. In the area of prenatal research, however, what remains to be seen is just what kind of principles will *guide* its use. Patrick Derr, a professor of philosophy at Clark University, has convincingly argued that cost-benefit analysis should in no instance be a morally-neutral enterprise. When cost is separated from ethics, Derr says, the moral foundations of a society are undermined, leading to a radical individualism and nihilism that can ultimately jeopardize the common life of our democracy. A theory of medicine that is predicated on a merely utilitarian vision of life will self-destruct. According to Derr, what is sometimes seen in neonatal applications is that the "technicians involved are doing calculations with value judgments that society and law would reject. Their science may be good, but what's wrong is that before attempting their science, they're foisting [upon society] value judgments that are not universally held."

A survey of recent medical literature would seem to confirm Derr's fears. The *New England Journal of Medicine* (April, 1994) includes research on the cost-benefits of prenatal testing. What is most disturbing is the emphasis that physicians and researchers are now placing on the *economic* valuation of human life. For instance, there is a discussion of the "considerable savings in diagnostic costs" that can be achieved with biochemical prenatal screening as opposed to the burdensome costs "of maintaining the . . . fetuses with Down's syndrome who are not identified prenatally."<sup>5</sup> An editorial entitled "Prenatal Diagnosis—Why Is 35 a Magic Number?" advocates aggressive prenatal testing, regardless of maternal age, to avoid unwanted problem births and emphasizes the economic, medical and societal costs of bringing abnormal [in this case, Down's] infants into the world:

Because limited resources now restrict the number of amniocenteses that can be performed and the number of couples who can be counseled, any restrictions should reflect the risk in an individual pregnancy, not just the woman's age, and should be based on an analysis that includes economic costs of short- and long-term medical, social, and home care for affected children, many of whom mature into physically and intellectually impaired adults.<sup>6</sup>

The editorial's co-author, Dr. Stephen G. Pauker of the New England Medical Center (at Tufts University School of Medicine), argues that, in the area of prenatal testing, cost may be only one among many factors, but "as available funds for everything diminish, it becomes more important to use whatever technology we have in significant ways." Pauker and many like-minded colleagues have adopted a zero-sum analysis: our resources aren't infinite; if more money is spent on X, we will have less money to

spend on Y and Z. Pauker also asks:

Are there societies in this world today where people make choices [to terminate a pregnancy] based upon the sex of the child? Is a society that allows this any less moral if it bases such choices on economic factors? I can't say. It's a complicated choice. I'm not about to make a judgment. To make decisions, to label or to judge is simply to play on emotions and not logic.

According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, about one percent of the 1.5 million abortions performed in the U.S. during 1992 occurred because the mother was advised of an abnormality, and an additional 12% were terminated because the mother feared that her fetus might have been harmed by medications or other conditions.

But what actually compels women to test and, subsequently, to have abortions in these cases? In one illuminating *New York Times* Op-Ed piece, Dr. Kenneth Prager, associate clinical professor of medicine at Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons, blames the proliferation of prenatal testing on a kind of individualistic hedonism. In the United States, he writes, patients commonly "believe they have an unlimited right to the most expensive care, no matter how inappropriate the circumstances, and . . . wish to have their fears of illness allayed, no matter how remote its likelihood."<sup>7</sup> Expectant parents commonly fear the unknown. Prenatal technology can provide them with an abundance of information about their unborn child, but the science is admittedly imperfect and expensive. Some parents demand testing despite its cost and, should there be a problem with the accuracy of the prenatal report, there is now legal recourse. So-called "wrongful life" lawsuits, in which parents sue their physicians for withholding results of a genetic test, or for providing inaccurate reports that "resulted" in the unwanted birth, are increasing dramatically.

The fear of such malpractice claims actually propels the prenatal testing machine forward. For "Pro-choice" testing advocates, as well as litigation-wary physicians, the more parents know and the earlier they know it, the less the risk of a "costly" child being born. And there are other participants in this "industry" that have a vested interest in the *in vitro* guarantee of human physical perfection: without question, insurance companies—and insurance economics—are playing an increasing role in coercing families to terminate "problem" pregnancies. There are already reports of cases in which insurance carriers have attempted to deny coverage when prenatal abnormalities are detected. Dr. Robert Fink, a pulmonary specialist who treats cystic fibrosis patients at the Children's National Medical Center in Washington, D.C., calls this "prenatal blackmail."

The lifetime cost of care for a person with cystic fibrosis is now estimated

at one million dollars. Ideally, so great a burden would be shared by familial and societal resources, as well as insurance. But when such huge costs collide with limited health-care resources in a nation that has legally and culturally sanctioned abortion, families and their “imperfect” unborn children potentially face great risk of exploitation.

Dr. Fink claims that one expectant Catholic couple in suburban Maryland, who already had a child with cystic fibrosis, were told by their health maintenance organization that their policy would pay for prenatal testing, but only if the couple agreed to abort if the test detected another fetus with cystic fibrosis. In a clearly-coercive move, the HMO implied that if the parents decided to bring an abnormal pregnancy to term, the infant would be denied benefits altogether. Says Fink: “It’s illegal to cancel group policies, but not illegal to raise rates [to force families out of care]. What we have seen locally is that the insurance companies are typically represented by individual case managers who push intimidation, but know they will ultimately lose in court.”

When reached for comment on the Maryland case, Harvie Raymond, director of managed-care operations for the Health Insurance Association of America, said: “I don’t believe that that kind of logic is being followed by a majority of plans across the country. We, as an industry, follow the laws of the land.” Although Raymond sees the Maryland case as an exception to “general” practice, he emphasizes that rising costs are a factor that must be dealt with, but Americans “are not willing to talk about economic rationing, and the fact that it might be needed.” Raymond’s comments will hardly ease the fear that market efficiency—as well as medical and scientific efficacy—are now more important than morality.<sup>8</sup>

Exactly what effect does the expansion of scientific research have on the growing exploitation of prenatal testing? One biotechnology insider, interviewed on the basis of anonymity, has this to say: “For most researchers, the general goal of prenatal genetic science is the understanding and prevention of illness on a genetic level, *not* the termination of unwanted, abnormal children.” She also argues that cost-benefit analysis has always been an implicit factor in research, but that its presence has neither driven nor tainted the nobler aim of science. But is this always true? In the last decade, both in medical literature and in scientific laboratories, cost-benefit analysis has come to the forefront, and there can be little doubt, given all the financial calculations currently applied to testing, that many researchers see prenatal screening’s *main function* to be the targeting and elimination of “unwanted” and/or “abnormal” life—surely an alarming trend.

A sample of recently-funded research projects at two national health

facilities—the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR), and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (a division of the National Institutes of Health)—confirms that cost-benefit analyses are indeed becoming routine in scientific methodology. For example, in 1994, the AHCPR provided grant and research funding toward the publication of “A Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of Amniocentesis and Chorionic Villus Sampling for Prenatal Genetic Testing.” In this analysis, which among other things measures testing costs against the lifetime-care costs of undetected abnormalities, the “savings” are cold-bloodedly calculated at \$103,329 and \$111,184 per abnormal birth averted for amniocentesis and chorionic villus sampling, respectively.<sup>9</sup> Apparently no thought is given to parents who may not wish to “avert.” Additional comments are also revealing:

It has been suggested by some that prenatal testing be extended to women aged 30 at their expected date of delivery. Although women in the lower age groups have lower frequencies of genetic abnormalities, they comprise a large fraction of the natality cohort. Therefore, strategies for testing these women could potentially avert larger numbers of abnormal births than would be averted under current strategies of testing at age 35.<sup>10</sup>

In short, such “cost-benefit” proposals for aggressive testing—aimed directly at the termination of prenatal life—demonstrate what happens when science is detached from morality. They also raise the question: Where are the millions needed to fund such “research” coming from? And, if much of it is U.S. government money, does it not put our government’s *imprimatur* on the “results”—including lethal policies that many if not most taxpayers might strongly oppose?

The reality is that, despite all the talk of “cost-effectiveness,” huge amounts of federal and private money *are* being spent on “prenatal screening” that targets defective infants. In 1995, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development contributed over \$7 million to projects concerned with prenatal diagnosis. Over \$5 million went to the development of a perinatal research facility at Georgetown University, a Jesuit institution. A closer look at other NICHD grants is also enlightening. The foundation for Blood Research in Scarborough, Maine, was awarded \$368,502 for a project which involved a “feasibility analysis” to determine whether introducing “screening measurements for Down’s syndrome can be justified in the first trimester, based on cost and medical efficacy.”

Researchers at the University of South Alabama were awarded \$97,815 to help identify and prevent developmental disorders, including learning disabilities, by studying the functioning of the fetus’ autonomic nervous system (ANS). The project description includes this premise: “We believe

that differences in intrinsic ANS activity and cardiac responsivity may ultimately help to identify the fetus-at risk for neurobehavioral abnormalities and hence facilitate the implementation of *appropriate intervention protocols* early in the course of development” [author’s emphasis].<sup>11</sup> Exactly what “intervention” might be appropriate isn’t spelled out, of course, but in our “therapeutic abortion” era it isn’t hard to imagine what the “researchers” have in mind?

Without doubt, one can see in such examples the shift away from the traditionally-accepted medical role of providing compassionate *care* to those with defects towards a “philosophy” dominated by economic calculations of *what the afflicted cost us*. Another clear example of this trend can be seen in a study published in the summer 1994 issue of *Inquiry*, a health-economics journal: the California Birth Defects Monitoring Program, led by Dr. Norman J. Waitzman, measured the economic costs of the 18 leading birth defects in California. In the introduction, researchers assert that “little is known about birth defects’ economic burden to society.”<sup>12</sup> The study then goes on to provide comprehensive estimates of direct costs (medical, inpatient, outpatient, developmental services, special education) as well as indirect costs (i.e., mortality and morbidity) accumulated for each category of illness. Waitzman and his colleagues conclude as follows:

The cost estimates presented in this study provide a basis for assessing prevention strategies in cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analyses. . . . Based on our estimates of societal costs, additional research on the etiology and epidemiology of birth defects may have a net economic benefit, if such research leads to new preventive strategies.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the study, victims of spina bifida, heart defects, musculoskeletal defects, Down’s syndrome, cerebral palsy and other abnormalities are treated with coldly economic and chillingly dehumanizing language. For example, in predicting the future of these infants, researchers conclude that “Productivity is lost because of premature mortality and heightened morbidity.”<sup>14</sup> The study consistently implies that economically unproductive lives are not worth saving—or living.

With such utilitarian financial calculations directing research, the U.S. may fast be approaching the advancement and implementation of programs similar to those already being carried out in Holland. To give just one example, Dutch researchers spent approximately \$1.5 million on 2,816 comprehensive amniocenteses in a genetic screening/chromosomal analysis study, and only casual reference was given to the 48 *healthy* and 57 “defective fetuses” that were destroyed as a result of the tests. In its

conclusion, the Dutch team triumphantly emphasized the fact that:

This (1.5 million) is in the same order of magnitude as the costs for taking care of one patient with Down's syndrome in a medical institution for a period of 60 years. Seen in the light of a cost-benefit analysis, the conclusion is obvious.<sup>15</sup>

Seen in another light, a different conclusion can be drawn. As we move further away from respect for the inviolability of human life towards a mere calculation of cost-effectiveness, contemporary society must examine whether its utopian attempts to abolish suffering will bring with them the abolition of its soul as well.

**T**he late Flannery O'Connor, generally regarded as among America's finest 20th century authors (and no stranger to suffering herself), wrote a too-little-known essay on suffering, "A Memoir of Mary Ann," which includes this penetrating insight: "One of the tendencies of our age is to use the suffering of children to discredit the goodness of God, and once you have discredited His goodness, you are done with Him. . . . In this popular pity, we mark our gain in sensibility and our loss in vision."<sup>16</sup> Our desire to "fix" the abnormalities that exist within the womb has led to the sanctioning of a process that allows the unchallenged obliteration of "problem" lives. The attempt to eliminate suffering by eliminating the lives of those who suffer may seem to some as being economically and scientifically "sensible" but, as O'Connor's paradigm points out, such attempts dramatically underscore a morally blind convergence of misguided compassion and utilitarian economics.

The lost "vision" that O'Connor mourns can still be found, however. It exists within the insights of those extraordinary teachers, friends, parents, and siblings who have known children with birth defects. Our "society" may calibrate these children's worth in dollars, but those who love them measure their worth in the heart. Following are just two examples, taken from personal correspondence:

- Two years ago, at age 17, a cystic fibrosis patient named Michelle died after a life of enormous suffering. Her best friend, a senior in high school at the time, says this in retrospect: "I could not see my life without her once I met her. It wasn't only me she affected. It was everyone around her. Without her, the strength I [now] have would not be apparent."
- A student of Special Education, whose sister Jessie has "special needs," says "It is as if two sides of science are racing against one another. One side is searching for a cure and the other side is getting

rid of the reasons why we are searching for cures. I cannot lie. Life without my sister would be a lot easier. But I don't remember anyone promising me an easy life."

Such accounts take us back to our beginning, to the birth of Domenica Lawson. In his account of her birth, Dominic Lawson wrote of seeing for the first time her extra fontanel, enlarged tongue, and asiatic eyes—the "stigmata of Down's syndrome." Lawson's description brings to mind a true story, worth mentioning here, about markings of a different kind.

Once, in the marketplace of Zanzibar (the fabled "spice island" off the east-African coast), a fish was found to have astonishing marks on its tail that read in Arabic "There is no God but God"—the excited crowd in the market bid and bargained heatedly over the fish, for such a unique phenomenon was considered to be of inestimable value. The scene is quite believable, certainly to believers: the mysterious, awesome markings made manifest truth that is indelibly imprinted upon every living thing—the unavoidable task of nature to proclaim the Divine.

As the pressure to kill the imperfect among us increases, and as a cost-benefit analysis of prenatal research divorced from any recognition of the sanctity of human life continues to grow in acceptance, the argument must time and again be made that, behind every ultrasound, amniocentesis and blood-sample test there is the real flesh, blood and bone of a child. A child who will someday celebrate, glorify, revere and reflect the eternal. Who among us can say that their lives, in whatever form they may take, will not somehow deliver back to us what is best in us?

We will not know their worth unless we hold them tenderly in our hands, regard the mystery of their afflicted shape, and—like the marks in Zanzibar—translate their shape into symbol, their symbol into words, and those words into commonly accepted truths about the benevolence of creation. For society to be able to do this, it must possess a language that is circumscribed by faith and rooted in the civic ethos of a principled democracy, one that respects all human life, accepts the unavoidable nature of suffering, and recognizes the existence of a moral authority outside—and beyond—itself.

It is not unlikely that, in just a matter of years, first-trimester prenatal screening using maternal blood samples could be perfected to detect the unborn asthmatic, the mentally ill, the diabetic, the autistic, and the dyslexic. What will come of these test results? Where will the gods of cost-efficiency lead us then? Who will defend the multitude of flawed lives that

may be deemed too economically burdensome to exist?

Ultimately, we must ask ourselves: How many marked generations will, without vigilance, be silently thrown out to sea?

#### NOTES

1. Dr. Karl Binding (Essay I) and Dr. Alfred Hoche (Essay II), *Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life*, trans. Walter E. Wright, Ph.D. and Patrick G. Derr, Ph.D., (Leipzig, Germany: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1920).
2. *The Spectator*, 24 June 1995.
3. Paul Harris, "War of Words Born Out of Grief," *Daily Mail*, 4 July 1995, p. 14.
4. See Sally Lehrman, "To Test—or Not to Test," *San Francisco Sunday Examiner and Chronicle*, 8 November 1992.
5. James E. Haddow et al., "Reducing the Need for Amniocentesis in Women 35 Years of Age or Older with Serum Markers for Screening," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 1994, vol. 330, no. 16, page 1118.
6. Stephen G. Pauker and Susan P. Pauker, "Prenatal Diagnosis—Why is 35 a Magic Number?," *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 1994, vol. 330, no. 16, page 1152.
7. Kenneth Prager, M.D., "Patient, Heal Thyself," *The New York Times*, 15 February 1994.
8. See Jeffrey Goldberg, "Free Market Economics, Old Testament Morality," *The Washington Post*, 23 October 1988.
9. Paul S. Heckerling and Marion S. Verp, "A Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of Amniocentesis and Chorionic Villus Sampling for Prenatal Genetic Testing," *Medical Care*, 1994, vol. 32, no. 8, pp. 863-880.
10. *Ibid.*
11. From a computer report entitled "NICHD Projects Concerned with Human Prenatal Diagnosis, FY'95 as of 7/27/95," supplied by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. One additional grant must be noted here. Case Western Reserve University was awarded \$130,035 to examine the interaction between endurance exercise and the course and outcome of pregnancy. A group of "150 well-conditioned women"—75 runners and 75 aerobic dancers—are to be studied using the broad hypothesis that, above a threshold level, "endurance types of exercise have a negative . . . effect on multiple aspects of the reproductive process in female recreational endurance athletes." Methodologies are to include "underwater weighing and skinfold measurements" for assessing body composition, treadmill testing, and tracking of menstrual cycles. Researchers propose that the information obtained in this study will have a direct application to women considering pregnancy. So, fear not. Thanks to the hard work over at NICHD, ladies who wish to run and dance have been informed that they can do so, if they proceed with caution. Those who decide to bear children can do so, too, if they slow down a bit. And, should these mothers conveniently discover sometime in their first trimester that an ill-conditioned child grows within their womb, they presumably can adopt the appropriate *interaction protocol* and try again.
12. Norman J. Waitzman, Patrick S. Romano, and Richard M. Scheffler, "The Estimates of the Economic Costs of Birth Defects," *Inquiry*, 1994, vol. 31, pp. 188-205.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. Nico J. Leschot, et al., "A Critical Analysis of 75 Therapeutic Abortions," 10 *Early Human Development*, 292, (1985).
16. Flannery O'Connor, *Mystery and Manners*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), pp. 226-227.



## The Abortionist as Craftsman

Faith Abbott

“There’s a great deal of craft to this procedure,” says Dr. James McMahon of Los Angeles. He performs abortions, and has a real passion for his work. While there are some doctors who consider abortion “a necessary evil” and some who perform abortions only as “a last resort,” there are now specialists in abortions *of last resort*—the very late-term ones. When the demand for legal abortion was propagandized as “a basic constitutional right” many obstetrician/gynecologists decided to make abortion their specialty, and within that specialty there emerged another field of expertise: abortions of the *worst* kind.

So it seems that within a relatively short time, “pregnancy terminators” have evolved into abortionists who are not only craftsmen but also heroes.

How had they first become known as “heroes”? Well, back in 1985, the *New York Times Magazine* (Aug. 11) ran a cover story titled “The Abortion Conflict: What It Does to One Doctor.” Joseph Sobran wrote about it in this journal (*Fall*, 1985); his title was “The Abortionist as Hero.” He begins:

The abortionist has been the forgotten man in the abortion controversy, even though many states have been paying him handsomely for his services. The word “abortion” has been rendered almost bland by repetition, but the word “abortionist” still has moral voltage: it reminds us that there is a real live man doing something to the unborn child. . . . To refer to this man is to concretize what the pro-abortion forces would prefer to keep abstract. And the associations of the word remain grim.

Sobran explains that, until recently, pro-abortionists had tried to keep the abortionist himself offstage, but their strategy appeared to be changing: why shouldn’t the abortionist be brought out of the closet and portrayed as a star? They knew the always-sympathetic media would be helpful: once these doctors “came out” they would be targeted by *anti*-abortion forces, attacked in print and possibly (literally) in person by fanatics. If they didn’t become martyrs (literally), doctors who persevered despite suffering for their “conviction” that abortion serves “a moral need” *could* certainly be glorified as heroes.

I reread Sobran’s article after I’d read about Dr. McMahon in the Los

---

**Faith Abbott** is our senior contributing editor. This article first appeared in our *Spring*, 1990 issue, almost six years before the term “partial-birth abortion” was used—but the “procedure” was already well known and by no means rare, as the article makes clear.

*Angeles Times Magazine* (Feb. 7) in an article titled “The Abortions of Last Resort.” (Subhead: “The Question of Ending Pregnancy in Its Later Stages May Be the Most Anguishing of the Entire Abortion Debate.”) McMahon is a very out-of-the-closet doctor.

At age 51, he is, we’re told, one of the relatively few doctors in this country specializing in abortions up to 24 weeks into a pregnancy—almost six months—and he has “in dire circumstances” done them just six weeks short of due-date. The “abortions of last resort” make up about one third of the 1,200 abortions he does each year. It pays to be a specialist in this field: for the easiest and earliest abortions, Dr. McMahon charges \$500 (more than double the rate asked at most clinics) and \$8,000 for the most complicated procedures. He employs two staff doctors, but there’s a long apprenticeship—he doesn’t allow doctors to work for him until they have performed *at least* 600 abortions: “Frankly,” he says, “I don’t think I was any good at all until I had done 3,000 or 4,000.” (He does not mention any mishaps during his long apprenticeship.)

About abortion in general, McMahon says: “That’s my specialty . . . that’s my expertise. That’s my passion.” This one-time Altar Boy “who still attends Mass occasionally” performed his first abortion in 1972, when California was one of the few states where women could easily get a legal abortion. Fascinated by the technical aspects of the procedure, he began gradually to specialize in it, abandoning plans for a family practice that would have included obstetrics: “I feel that you can’t do both. You do a delivery, and then you do a late abortion. . . . I couldn’t take the emotional roller-coaster ride.” What about his conscience and his “religious beliefs?” Well, he says, *both* have “answered the basic questions” that arise from late abortions: “I’ve always been a classic liberal. I believe in freedom in its broadest sense. . . . I frankly think the soul or personage comes in when the fetus is accepted by the mother.”

There is a rather blurry photograph of the doctor, standing in his waiting room (which is also blurry). We are told that the doctor isn’t afraid to be photographed even though he is “keenly aware that the morbid realities of his medical specialty would make him an especially good target for the militants of the anti-abortion movement.” But McMahon is not worried, because they can’t *find* him. He doesn’t advertise in the Yellow Pages; he agreed to be interviewed for the article on the condition that the name and exact location of his two offices not be used. His surgical center has been outfitted with “hidden, Israeli-made steel shutters that drop over his plate-glass windows at the flip of a switch.” It’s not clear just how women do

find him, but find him they do—from as far away as Kansas City, Philadelphia, even the Philippines.

The place for “the abortions of last resort” sounds almost *like* a resort:

From the busy street, it is easy to miss the little building hidden behind a high stucco wall and a locked gate. Its courtyard is a sculpture garden, where the soothing burble of a fountain smothers the din of the Santa Monica Freeway. Inside, the pastel-washed waiting room could be the lobby of a fancy small hotel. Vivaldi and Chopin play softly from hidden speakers; tropical fish make neon streaks in an oversized tank.

(Note: even the speakers are hidden.)

A few days after I’d read about Dr. McMahon, I found myself stalled near the checkout at D’Agostino’s supermarket, looking at the tabloids and magazines that are always displayed where women in slow-moving lines are the most vulnerable; and there, I saw, was the February issue of *New York Woman*. Among other topics listed on its cover (“Gay Women on Their Own Terms”; “Baryshnikov’s Perpetual Motion”) was: “What a Gynecologist Thinks.” (Another attack on women’s vulnerability?) I leafed through the magazine and found that article, which was titled: “The Gynecologist” (“Why does he do it? Does he think about sex when he does it? What’s his opinion of the women he does it to? And everything else you’ve ever wanted to know.”). I suspected that in the “and everything else you’ve ever wanted to know” part there might be something about abortion, so—for professional reasons, of course—I plopped *New York Woman* in the cart (atop my President’s Choice Decadent Chocolate Chip Cookies) and went home to read all about the popular Dr. Thomas Kerenyi of famous Mount Sinai Hospital here on Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue.

I was still thinking about Dr. McMahon when I read about Dr. Kerenyi. “A Tale of Two Doctors” began to write itself in the back of my mind. Would the two heroes differ on abortion? Yes, up to a point: Dr. McMahon had given up obstetrics because delivering babies *and* aborting them was too much of a roller-coaster ride; Dr. Kerenyi somehow puts up with it, even though he thinks of abortion as “the true downside” of his work—especially the second-trimester ones, where “the procedure is so unpleasant.” But he’d be a hypocrite, he says, if he refused to do abortions: he believes that abortion is a legitimate part of medicine and should be performed by skilled physicians “in the mainstream of practice”—and you have to take the good with the bad—a woman’s right to make decisions about her own body is absolute. Every child should be a planned one.

Dr. Kerenyi came to America from his native Hungary in 1956. In medical school at Cornell, he ruled out internal medicine (too “cerebral”) and

psychiatry (“all talk, no action”) and decided on surgery, within which ob/gyn was his “obvious” choice:

The instant gratification of obstetrics, the variety, the dynamic sense of things moving on, all of it plays well to his restlessness. It also revs his ego: He believes his personal intervention really makes a difference in people’s lives. That feeling of power helps to compensate for a lifetime of interrupted sleep.

Furthermore, he likes *women*, and “New York women particularly appeal to him, because they’re assertive about their right to information.”

Many ob/gyns, when they reach his age (he *looks* fortyish) think about retiring from the “ob” part, which involves all those erratic hours; they want more time with their own families, etc. But those things don’t bother Kerenyi so much as other things like senseless hospital rules, burdensome paperwork, and the spectre of malpractice suits.

He remembers, from his residency, the traumatic results of illegal abortions; now he is “aggravated” because “he sees the pendulum swinging back, the antiabortion forces gaining ground.” In the late 1970s, when he was head of obstetrics at Mount Sinai, he insisted on a designated area for performing abortions—away from the labor floor—so women coping with the pain of ending up with “nothing” wouldn’t hear new mothers “cooing to their babies on the other side of the curtain.” Nevertheless, it strikes him as a ridiculous and unnecessary euphemism that today the abortion unit at Mount Sinai is known as the Pregnancy Interruption Service. He fears that this unit will eventually begin to disappear “until, of course, the daughter or niece of someone on the Mount Sinai staff needs an abortion, and suddenly there will be a protest: Why can’t we do it here?” If his private patients come to Mount Sinai for their deliveries, then why, he wonders, shouldn’t they be able to come for their abortions as well?

You can’t help but like Dr. Kerenyi’s looks: there’s a full-page picture of him, at his desk in his Park Avenue office; there is another full-page picture of him examining the very pregnant part of a woman. “On an average day, Dr. Kerenyi is visited by twenty-five to thirty patients.” He’s busy, all right. In articles about doctors, there is usually, near the beginning, a description of the doctor’s surroundings (as in the article about Dr. McMahon)—his pleasant, cheerful office; his desk with photos of his children—and of the doctor as he goes-into-action on “a typical day.” One of Dr. Kerenyi’s associates will do abortions “only when absolutely necessary” within the first trimester: another does only *early* second-trimester abortions, so Dr. Kerenyi “gets stuck with the worst ones.” He’s got a *bad* one today, and it makes him *angry*: it’s a teenager who is almost 23 weeks pregnant—one more week and, by law, she’d have to go to term. This kid,

the doctor thinks, is putting her life in jeopardy because of “sheer ignorance”—hers, her parents’, *someone’s*. But on the other hand, why should she be forced to have a baby “when she is still a child herself”?

This anger, however, is *useful* because “it helps him to keep focused, for the same reason McEnroe singles out a judge to abuse—it gets the adrenalin pumping, it hones his performance to a knife edge.” But that seems a wrong metaphor: this doctor’s performance requires not a knife but forceps. “He doesn’t think about what he’s doing while he’s doing it, or he’d get up and walk out of the room.” Instead,

He’s thinking: *you’re taking an airplane apart*. With forceps and the strength of his arms he pulls, removing the fetus piece by piece, ticking them off to himself as he goes, the lungs, the bowels, the limbs, *this is an airplane and you’re a mechanic*, his hands tired from squeezing and pulling, now just the big one, the head, he’s got it, he expels his breath in one loud sigh, it’s almost over . . .

It is not surprising that Dr. Kerenyi considers these late abortions to be “a grim and distressing business.” He waxes nostalgic: “Once upon a time”—when the prostaglandin induction method was in vogue—“they were much more elegant.” (*Elegant?*) In those days, the doctor simply injected the patient with saline or the prostaglandin drug and left, while the woman proceeded to go through from six to twenty-four hours of labor, after which she would “expel the fetus.” For the nurses, left there to handle the patient and dispose of the aborted remains, it was not “elegant.” Nor was it elegant for the woman who, after all the pain, might actually *see* the product: a dead baby. But this procedure offered the doctor “relative noninvolvement”: one doctor told researchers that he still uses the “noninvolvement” method because “Killing a baby is not a way I want to think about myself.”

Evidently lots of people have trouble thinking about “the procedure.” That Los Angeles *Times* article mentioned University of California researchers who, in 1979, surveyed some 250 second-trimester abortions and the reactions of doctors, patients, and even nurses. Here’s the description of what the “elegant” method produced:

The woman who went through a prostaglandin amnio abortion had a long and painful experience, which made it generally impossible for her to turn away from the reality of her choice. . . . Most of the amnio subjects described the product of labor as a “baby” and . . . found the unremitting quality of the labor pain more difficult than childbirth. Anger at the attending physician for being unavailable was prominent.

And the nurses? Well, six years ago several hospitals in the San Francisco

Bay area began limiting second-trimester abortions because nurses were refusing “to attend the procedures.” The aborted fetuses, they said, looked too much like the “preemies” they were attending elsewhere.

The article informs us that these days the most frequently used second-trimester abortion procedure (less traumatic for women, the bloodiest and most unpleasant for the doctor) is dilation and evacuation, which is more comfortably referred to as the D & E. A day or so before this surgery, the woman’s cervix is dilated: she is under light anaesthesia for the actual procedure and so has little sense of what is going on as the fetus is dismembered inside her and pulled out with forceps (*pretend you’re an airplane mechanic*). Or, as *New York Woman* puts it (paraphrasing Dr. Kerenyi): “Fifteen minutes or so of Demerol-induced oblivion and that’s it.” This method has been called a “Godsend” for the patient: for the doctor, it is—well, “grim and distressing.”

The woman may go into post-abortion trauma later; the doctor—even one skilled in fantasizing—may suffer *immediate* post-abortion trauma: the cause of death for an aborted fetus sounds like a pathologist’s report on an accident or violent-crime victim, as Dr. Steven F. Seidman wrote in this journal (*Winter*, 1989):

The cause of death? Multiple blunt instrument trauma to the body, profound blood loss, massive intra-cranial hemorrhage and depressed skull fracture, laceration of the liver, ruptured spleen, lung collapse, profound shock.

By the way, *New York Woman* knew its readers would be happy to learn that for Dr. Kerenyi “Making love has not been a problem: his instincts take over; he doesn’t have to keep thinking *body parts*.” Or airplane parts either, presumably.

But now back to Dr. McMahon, that clever craftsman, who “as more and more doctors are withdrawing from doing abortions” has “forged ahead, developing new techniques.” He calls one such technique the “intrauterine cranial decompression,” explaining that “I want to deal with the head last, because that’s the biggest problem.” Rather than dismembering the fetus and pulling the parts out with forceps, he *arranges* it so he can remove it feet-first. Before the skull emerges he “collapses” it by inserting a special instrument that extracts the fluid; by keeping the fetus intact he “runs less risk of internal injury to the woman.” I was telling my husband about that and it reminded him of something he’d clipped from *The Economist* last November:

A single quotation can help to give the Nazis’ tone. Before they had discovered the virtues of Zyklon-B cyanide gas, they used the exhaust gas from lorries to kill

THE HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

their victims. A technical report of June 1942 read: "Since October 1941 . . . 97,000 were processed in the three trucks in use *without any faults appearing in the vehicles.*" [Emphasis mine.]

After Dr. McMahon told his interviewer that he wanted to deal with the head last, because that's the biggest problem, he added this: "From my point of view, the fetus is a potential problem to the patient." So—in this Tale of Two Doctors—we have one who thinks about airplane parts and another who takes pride in demolishing the "problem" while keeping the vehicle intact.

"Science," we read in the Los Angeles *Times Magazine*, "has come far enough to leave some doctors increasingly leery of later abortions," and the article mentions one prominent doctor who has suggested that physicians "voluntarily" limit themselves to doing abortions no later than 22 weeks. Phillip Stubblefield, chief of ob/gyn at Maine Medical Center in Portland, and a former President of the National Abortion Federation ("an organization of providers") admits that he "personally" finds it difficult and painful to do an abortion in the latter part of the second trimester: "There is the feeling that one is close to viability, and this is something that at some point is wrong."

That point, Daniel Callahan believes, lies somewhere in the second trimester, between 12 and 24 weeks. Callahan is director of the Hastings Center, a New York medical-ethical research institute. He is also quoted in that article: "As much as I would prefer to avert my moral gaze," he writes, "a late abortion forces me to confront the reality of abortion and my own incompletely suppressed doubts." And he "suspects" that:

for all but a small minority of those who, like myself, count themselves on the pro-choice side in the abortion debate, the matter of late abortions cannot help triggering distress. It stretches our commitment to the breaking point . . . at some point, the fetus does gain moral standing, and at that point its rights take precedence over the right of a woman to destroy it.

But Anne Walshe, the "blunt-spoken" administrator of a Manhattan abortion clinic (she won't say which one, just that it does as many as 16,000 abortions a year, of which at *least* half are performed during the second trimester) shows little patience for the idea that a late abortion somehow poses a more difficult moral judgment: "What's the difference? Abortion is abortion."

"What is it like for you, performing abortions?" Sue Nathanson asked the doctor when they were scheduling hers. She had noticed the baby picture on his desk. Said the doctor: "Before I had my son I didn't think about it very much. I just learned how to perform them and carried out the

procedure. But now that I have my son, it's gotten harder for me. The unborn child seems more real. But my job is to help my patient, and it's the woman who is my patient."

Sue Nathanson—psychologist, wife of a lawyer, mother of three children—is the author of a book about her post-abortion trauma, *Soul Crisis*. The various research groups who are trying to prove that *if* there is such a thing as post-abortion syndrome it is *curable* would do well to read her book. So would Dr. McMahon.

**I** wonder what Sue Nathanson would make of his "frankly thinking" that "the soul or personage comes in when the fetus is accepted by the mother"? She does not bother with the word "fetus": she knew that she was "physically and psychologically merged with another life" from "the beginning." In fact, "I knew exactly when I conceived this child-not-to-be. It was that Tuesday . . ."

So it seems her post-abortion trauma really began *before* the abortion. And she was doubly traumatized when she had a tubal ligation; she had scheduled this for as soon as possible after the abortion, because she was afraid that if she had another unplanned pregnancy "the awesome, primal power of the longing to have a baby would combine with a yearning to fill the void created by the loss of my fourth child." She knew she could not again choose to bear "the suffering that accompanied my abortion." Though she had made "the best, most rational choice I could" she was unprepared for "the anguish to which the sudden, surgical loss of my fertility would give rise."

If post-abortion and post-fertility trauma could be measured on the Richter Scale, hers was not a mere 5.5 rumble but a San Francisco earthquake: "My abortion shattered the frame that gave life its meaning." She had expected aftershocks, but not of such magnitude; the depth of her sorrow and the intensity of her anguish drove her to the brink of suicide. Because much of her book comes from the private journal she kept, there is a lot in the present tense: she feels

indescribable guilt over having taken the life of my child, rage at myself for allowing this child to be stripped from my body, and a barely tolerable self-loathing for my mutilated and sterile body overtakes me in a great tidal wave. . . . The inner torment is so unbearable to me that the only peaceful state I can imagine is death . . . I can find no resting place. I have no inner center of peace and calm to which I can retreat. . . . There is only the anguish, the torment, the shredded remains of my annihilated child, my Self the murderer . . . I have chosen to annihilate a life I cherished, and now I want to annihilate myself . . . I am a Frankenstein who has transformed myself into a monster that will not die.



You don't have to read far into the book to realize that Sue Nathanson was the worst possible candidate for an abortion. Not only was she already a mother, she was the most ecstatic, "nurturing" mother anyone could imagine: discomforts of pregnancy, pains of childbirth, sleepless nights—all the things most mothers just *accept* were positively and joyfully *embraced* by Nathanson. And few women have written such paeans of praise to fertility: how "filled with pride" she had always been about "my female body and its awesome power to produce life. . . . mothering, like hunger, is a primordial instinct that begins to function automatically at conception . . ." You want to yell: Stop! Don't have the abortion!

So why did she have it? Well, Good Mother Sue was also a wife, and her husband made it "absolutely clear" that he didn't want a fourth child. There were his health problems, and financial worries and it might actually *kill* him to take care of another child. Her "wish to have this unborn, though very alive, fourth child is so strong it is palpable." But she could not "act upon my wish alone." The baby was growing in *her* body, not Michael's, and "this physical fact renders me all at once the judge, the jury, and the lawyers representing both sides. . . . I will keep that window in the firmament closed to my fourth child; I will not let it enter this world."

But she was "committed to life, not death." How could she find a way to accept the loss of her fourth child, and then the abrupt loss of her fertility? How could she live with herself "after choosing to deny life to the fourth child I had already begun to protect and nurture?"—and how, she wondered, can women, who are by nature the protectors and nurturers of the unborn, "commit infanticide and still live with themselves?"

A "Soul-Crisis," she explains, is her name for "an experience that consists of much more than an intense emotional reaction to loss and trauma. It involves the shattering of one's beliefs about oneself and one's life into fragments that cannot be put back together again in exactly the same way."

Getting put back together again involved a long, tortuous and torturous process. Eventually Nathanson the psychotherapist had to take charge of Nathanson the grieving mother, to bring about a reconciliation. What was essential was to discover new concepts. If the perpetrator and the victim were to coexist in one body, what had to be seen and understood was "the terrible choice of abortion" as *sacrifice* rather than *murder*.

The "psychological path to wholeness" did have a "spiritual" element: not God, but goddesses—the Sumerian ones, the Great Mother Goddess, the Moon Goddess (it seems the "growing literature" about Goddess-based

religion and its symbols is very “in” these days)—and Nathanson claims her research into ancient mythology and rituals somehow helped her to “wrest meaning from suffering.” And also to become a more effective psychotherapist: many of her clients have also had abortions and suffer psychological hang-ups about being murderers.

*Soul Crisis* is not a How-To book about recovering from post-abortion trauma: it’s about “the psychological tasks” Sue Nathanson faced in “working with my suffering” and “completing the work of restoration” which took “years of psychological effort” on her part. The book’s subtitle is *One Woman’s Journey through Abortion to Renewal*. But basically, *Soul Crisis* is the story of Sue Nathanson’s struggle to coexist with her forever-absent but ever-present fourth child, whom she never lets the reader forget: its ghostlike presence fills the entire book.

When you read about “beleaguered” abortionists as heroes and late-term abortionists as craftsmen, and ob/gyns who turn into airplane mechanics when they do abortions, you tend to wonder if there are any abortionists who turn back into *doctors*—the old-fashioned healing kind, whose concern for their patients extends into the future—who might even advise *against* a medical procedure that could adversely affect the patient’s mental stability. There are doctors who will perform abortions only if the life of the mother is in danger: are there any who will *not* do them to save the mother’s sanity? If there *are* any such doctors, it’s a pity Sue Nathanson didn’t have one.

But of course soul-crises are not the concern of abortionists. Give craftsman-abortionist McMahon credit, though: he believes in the existence of the *soul*. It’s what “comes in” when the fetus is accepted by the mother. Now since his “expertise” is in “the abortions of last resort,” the late ones, his patients are (presumably) women who have been, for whatever reasons, carrying non-accepted, soul-less, non-persons for many weeks. But what if Dr. McMahon, with all his tools ready and his patient on the table, were suddenly to be confronted by a woman announcing: “I have just accepted this fetus!” Would the doctor then “frankly think” that the fetus had instantaneously turned into a baby (with a soul)? Would he then put his tools away? (And if so, would he give his patient a refund?)

**B**ack at Mt. Sinai Hospital, it is Friday and Dr. Kerényi wants to speed up his last delivery so he can get out of town for the weekend. But his patient doesn’t want him to increase the IV drip because she knows that Pitocin-induced contractions are more painful than normal ones, and so she asks for only the most gradual increase of the drug. The doctor is

irritated, but thinks it's not fair to tell her this is silly—can't you suffer one little hour for me? He offered her an option, and so he can't refuse her choice. Even if he thinks she's making the wrong decision, he has to remind himself that *he* is not the one who's feeling what she's feeling. "He can't know what she's going through. . . . For that, he will always be grateful."

With late-term abortions, one big worry is that the baby will *survive*. This can get the doctor into a lot of trouble. But it doesn't happen as often as it used to, and anyway Dr. James McMahon, that master craftsman, doesn't have to worry: his method ensures that there will be no "live birth." And as he goes in with his three-millimeter instrument to collapse the baby's skull, McMahon feels no pain—physical *or* moral. Perhaps the ex-Altar Boy too will always be grateful for that. Then again, perhaps not.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Postscript* (December 21, 1995): Last November 2, I was reading the New York *Times* article on the "Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act" and its passage, the day before, by the House of Representatives. The second paragraph informs the reader that only two doctors—Martin Haskell of Ohio and James McMahon of California—have said publicly that for the late-term abortions they perform, they prefer the method the legislation would ban. But the last sentence in that paragraph literally made me gasp: it stated nonchalantly, almost as an afterthought or an "Oh, by the way . . ." that "Dr. McMahon died on Saturday in California."

Could this have happened and nobody told us? A phone call to colleagues in Los Angeles was met with astonishment and a "We'll get back to you." A few hours later the death was confirmed—by protesters who had picketed McMahon's clinic.

The *Times* ("All the news that's fit to print") ordinarily runs full obituaries of prominent doctors—especially those who had gained notoriety as "pioneers" in one or another field of expertise. Why then was there no obituary—not even a small death notice—in the *Times*, about Dr. McMahon's death on October 28th? (Nor, apparently, none in the Los Angeles papers, either?) Why this seeming cover-up, we wondered? Didn't the Pro-choice people in Congress (and in the media) consider this doctor a hero, worthy to be properly eulogized? After all, his method was considered "a godsend to the patient." Before we knew the facts about his death, we wondered if he'd committed suicide: that might have been reason for the news blackout—perhaps all that killing had got to him and he could no longer live with himself?

FAITH ABBOTT

As I was proof-reading this 1990 article for reprinting here, I couldn't help but notice the contrast between the way McMahon described his late-abortion procedure *then* and how it is described today, thanks to all the graphic pictorial and verbal depictions of the method that the debate in Congress has brought forth. In Dr. McMahon's description, "the intrauterine cranial decompression . . . collapses" the skull before it emerges "by inserting a special instrument that extracts the fluid." As everybody now knows, the "special instrument" inserted is a surgical *scissors*, the "fluid" is *brain*, and "extraction" means sticking a high-powered suction tube into the scissor-opening and sucking the baby's brains out.

And as I proof-read, these words of Dr. McMahon's leapt out at me: "I want to deal with the head last, because that's the biggest problem."

Dr. James McMahon died during surgery for a brain tumor.



Nick Dowling

*'By golly, you're right. There is some sort of warning on the side of the pack.'*

THE SPECTATOR 19 November 1994

34/WINTER 1996

# Aborting History

Ramesh Ponnuru

Cases before the Supreme Court concerning abortion have been known to generate controversy. So when the Justices agreed to hear *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (1989), they had to expect a flood of *amicus curiae* briefs from the National Organization for Women, Catholics United for Life, and the like. One brief, however, came from a less predictable quarter and attracted wide attention. It was submitted by three lawyers on behalf of 281 professional historians (later signatures brought the total to over 400). The brief's authors understood its novelty and significance: "Never before," the brief began, "have so many professional historians sought to address this Honorable Court in this way."

The historians claimed that Americans had recognized the right to choose abortion at the time of the Republic's founding. Further, they argued, nineteenth-century legislators restricted that right for four reasons that either no longer apply or are no longer constitutionally permissible: to protect women from unsafe abortions, to help physicians to constitute themselves as a profession, to enforce gender roles, and to prevent Catholic immigrants from increasing their proportion of the population. A concern for the alleged life of the fetus "became a central issue in American culture only in the late twentieth century." Since restrictions on abortion impose severe costs on women and since the historic rationales for those restrictions are discredited or obsolete, the historians concluded, the Court should affirm the constitutional right to abortion whose existence it had announced in *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

This historical account has important legal implications. Justice Blackmun's majority opinion in *Roe* drew support from the assertions that it was "doubtful" that the common law had ever prohibited abortion and that nineteenth-century statutes did not reflect a belief in the personhood of fetuses. The brief's account also obviously has implications outside the courthouse. If it were accurate, anti-abortion laws could be seen as an aberration from an American tradition, *Roe* as the restoration of that tradition. And the anti-abortion movement would be tainted by a history of racism and sexism.

But the brief's key claims are false. The law always restricted abortion,

---

Ramesh Ponnuru is the national reporter for *National Review*, in which this article first appeared (October 23, 1995); it is reprinted here with permission (© 1995, National Review, Inc.).

and the campaign against abortion did seek to protect what it viewed as fetal life. Moreover, the published work of signatories to the brief disproves its historical arguments. The very sources on which the brief relies contradict its thesis. And its shoddiness is too pervasive and tendentious for mere incompetence to suffice to explain it.

The brief's history of abortion begins with the following paragraph:

As the Court demonstrated in *Roe v. Wade*, abortion was not illegal at common law. Through the nineteenth century American common-law decisions uniformly reaffirmed that women committed no offense in seeking abortions. Both common law and popular culture drew distinctions depending upon whether the fetus was "quick," i.e. whether the woman perceived signs of independent life. There was some dispute whether a common-law misdemeanor occurred when a third party destroyed a fetus, after quickening, without the woman's consent. But early recognition of this particular crime against pregnant women did not diminish the liberty of the woman herself to end a pregnancy in its early stages. [Emphasis in original.]

Almost every statement in this paragraph is false or misleading.

The historians' first source for their contention that "abortion was not illegal at common law," Justice Blackmun's opinion in *Roe*, based its more tentative version of this claim on a 1971 article by Cyril C. Means Jr. Means acknowledged that many authorities on the common law held abortion to be illegal. He argued, however, that two fourteenth-century cases held abortion at any stage of pregnancy to be neither a felony nor even a serious misdemeanor; that Bracton and *Fleta* had misunderstood the common law; and that Coke's "masterpiece of perversion" misled later writers.

Research since 1971 has thoroughly discredited Means's article. Full records of the cases at issue show that only procedural and evidentiary problems prevented the imposition of penalties, thus vindicating Bracton, *Fleta*, and Coke from the charges of scholarly error and misconduct. Indictments or appeals of felony for abortions dating as far back as 1200 demonstrate that neither a woman's consent nor absence of quickening rendered abortion legal. Nor were women who sought abortion immune from prosecution, in England or the Colonies.

The brief's second citation on abortion's status as a "common-law liberty" is of pages 3-19 of James C. Mohr's *Abortion in America*. The brief elsewhere praises this book ("widely regarded as accurate and comprehensive") and highlights Mohr's signing of the brief. Most of the cited pages do not examine the issue at hand, but on page 3 Mohr writes, "After quickening, the expulsion and destruction of a fetus without due cause was considered a crime." The historians next cite Means, repeating his slander against the common-law writers.

Last, they cite pages 119-121 of Angus McLaren's *Reproductive Rituals* to claim, "Even in cases involving brutal beatings of women in the late stages of pregnancy, common-law courts refused to recognize abortion as a crime, independent of assault upon the woman, or in one case 'witchcraft.'" Neither the cited pages nor any other pages of McLaren's book contain anything to support this proposition. On page 121, McLaren notes that "it is necessary to turn to the writings of the common-law advocates" to understand the legal status of abortion between 1650 and 1800; after examining a few of these writings, he summarizes, "Seventeenth-century jurists thus recognized that a woman could be charged with procuring her own abortion, but only after the foetus had quickened."

The historians next assert that abortion "was not uncommon in colonial America." They cite McLaren as the sole support for this astonishing statement. But his book deals with England, not America. The cited chapter contains just one quote on the prevalence of abortion—by an Englishman, in 1824, referring to the impressions that led Parliament to pass an anti-abortion law in 1803.

The extremely high birthrates of the time and the danger and ineffectiveness of contemporary methods of abortion suggest that it was uncommon. So does the high proportion of brides who were pregnant on their wedding day, a datum the brief oddly adduces in support of its contention. In *Intimate Matters*, John D'Emilio and brief signatory Estelle B. Freedman list *coitus interruptus*, prolonged nursing, and abstinence as methods used to limit family size in colonial America, adding that "other means to impede conception or terminate pregnancy were rarely employed."

The brief then turns to the claim that the abortion laws between 1820 and 1860 were aimed at maternal safety. According to the brief, New York lawmakers sought to protect women from dangerous medical treatment when they passed abortion regulations in 1828—a claim first made in another influential article by Means. His argument hinged on a proposed, but never passed, section of the bill that would have outlawed any surgery not necessary for the preservation of a patient's life. The sections regulating abortion contained similarly worded exceptions allowing abortions to save a pregnant woman's life; hence, he reasoned, they too were intended to prevent unnecessary operations from endangering lives.

Mohr's book explicitly refutes these arguments. If lawmakers had wished to regulate abortion merely as a dangerous form of surgery, they would neither have treated it separately nor have passed abortion regulations while defeating the proposed regulations on all surgery. The brief also reports

that the “act finally adopted applied only to surgical abortion”; but a glance at the text of the law, correctly quoted by Mohr, reveals that it applied to abortions by “any medicine, drug, substance or thing whatever, . . . any instrument or other means whatever.”

**T**he historians next examine the alleged motives for the laws enacted from the mid nineteenth century onward, starting with the desire of the “regular” physicians associated with the new American Medical Association to raise their status and incomes through regulation. The brief, in a passage relying on Mohr, describes the physicians’ movement against abortion as “one chapter in a campaign by doctors that reflected a professional conflict between ‘regulars’ (those who ultimately became the practitioners and proponents of scientific medicine) and ‘irregulars,’ who were often willing to perform abortions.” Mohr lists three professional motives for the regulars’ support for anti-abortion laws: such laws enlisted the power of the state to penalize, and to remove a competitive advantage of, the irregulars; they enforced standards on wayward regulars, thus “promoting a sense of professionalism”; and they let doctors “recapture what they considered to be their ancient and rightful place among society’s policymakers and savants.”

Neither the brief nor Mohr’s book presents any evidence that the legislators who enacted anti-abortion laws understood themselves to be acting primarily in these interests or that the voting public that consented to those laws understood them in that light. Whatever the physicians’ motives, they succeeded by persuading others of the justice of their cause. Many AMA members in the 1860s and 1870s also supported the legalization and regulation of prostitution as a public-health measure, but failed to convince their contemporaries.

More importantly, Mohr’s book makes clear that physicians opposed abortion in large part because of a concern for what they viewed as fetal life. He writes, “The regulars’ opposition to abortion was partly ideological, partly scientific, partly moral, and partly practical.” A few pages later, he expands on their moral views: “The nation’s regular doctors . . . defended the value of human life per se as an absolute.” Opposition to abortion as a species of killing forms the basis of each of the other three components. The doctors’ “ideological” opposition to abortion consisted of their belief in the Hippocratic Oath, which states: “I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy.” The “scientific” component of the physicians’ stance was their realization “that conception



inaugurated a more or less continuous process of development. . . . From this scientific reasoning stemmed the regulars' moral opposition to abortion at any stage of gestation."

By the "practical" reasons, Mohr means the professional motives already mentioned: eliminating competition, enforcing standards, and gaining the status of policymakers. The last two goals imply a prior determination on other grounds of a standard to enforce and a policy to make. Nor can the goal of eliminating competition be understood without reference to the physicians' abhorrence of abortion; otherwise, they could have performed abortions themselves.

While the brief does not treat the protection of alleged fetal life as a goal of the physicians, it refers on three occasions to the possibility that this goal motivated some physicians—each with comical shiftiness, as in the following passage:

A core purpose of the nineteenth-century laws, and of the doctors in supporting them, was to "control medical practice in the interest of public safety." This is not to deny that some doctors had moral objections to abortion, as well as moral and social views about women and race. But the most significant explanation for the drive by medical doctors for statutes regulating abortion is the fact that these doctors were undergoing . . . professionalization.

More than just "some doctors" had to share those "moral objections," since they formed the basis of the regulars' refusal to compete for the abortion trade.

And in fact, the campaign against abortion did not play a substantial role in professionalizing American medicine. Book-length discussions of medical professionalization written by signatories to the brief do not even mention the campaign, let alone make it a key factor in their narratives. Signatory Paul Starr's well-regarded *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*, for instance, mentions the campaign once, in a footnote on the involvement of physicians in projects of moral reform. *For Her Own Good*, by signatory Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, discusses professionalization as it relates to female patients without once mentioning the campaign. Signatory Judith Walzer Leavitt's *Brought to Bed* focuses on how childbirth moved from the home to the hospital; although the brief cites the book to show the centrality of "the medical profession's gradual consolidation of authority" to the shift, the book nowhere discusses the physicians' campaign against abortion as a part of that shift. The brief cites all three books in its section on professionalization without mentioning these points.

The brief weaves an even more tangled web in implying that nineteenth-century feminists supported abortion rights:

The women's movement of the nineteenth century affirmed that women should always have the right to decide whether to bear a child and sought to enhance women's control of reproduction through "voluntary motherhood," ideally to be achieved through periodic abstinence. Anxieties about changing family functions and gender roles were critical factors motivating the all-male legislatures that adopted restrictions on abortion.

The brief cites Linda Gordon's *Woman's Body, Woman's Right* to bolster its assertion that feminists favored "voluntary motherhood." But Prof. Gordon also writes, "[I]t is important to stress the fact that neither free lovers nor suffragists"—the advocates of voluntary motherhood—"approved of contraceptive devices," let alone abortion. Most feminists, she recognizes, opposed abortion. She signed the brief anyway. (So did Carl N. Degler, whose book *At Odds* notes that "during the Nineteenth century feminists and free lovers alike condemned abortion because it destroyed a human being.")

This section of the brief was altered when it was resubmitted to the Supreme Court in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992). The *Casey* brief acknowledges that "some feminists" (a curious phrase to apply to a group including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Victoria Woodhull) opposed abortion, but asserts that they did so "not on moral grounds, but as an object example of women's victimization at the hands of men."

While it is true that feminists viewed abortion as a result of "women's victimization," compassion for women who considered abortion did not preclude moral opposition to it. *The Revolution*, the feminist journal, argued that

the woman is awfully guilty who commits the deed. It will burden her conscience in life; it will burden her soul in death; but oh! thrice guilty is he who, for selfish gratification, heedless of her prayers, indifferent to her fate, drove her to the desperation which impelled her to the crime.

An editorial in *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* dubbed abortion "the Slaughter of the Innocents." It observed that abortion was often a reaction to "the slavery that child-bearing almost necessarily entails in our society as at present organized," but also declared that abortion "stamps the brand of Cain upon every woman who attempts or is accessory to it." Those who performed abortions did not get off lightly, either: "Let those who see any difference regarding the time when life, once begun, is taken, console themselves that they are not murderers having been abortionists."

Physicians and feminists were not alone in attacking abortion as “infanticide” and “murder.” A *New York Times* article on abortion declared, “Thousands of human beings are thus murdered before they have seen the light of this world.” It described the abortionist’s trade as “a systematic business in wholesale murder.” The imagery some writers used far exceeded in gruesomeness anything in today’s anti-abortion polemics. An 1880 *National Police Gazette* article began, “The civilization of today is opposed to babies, and its basest product is the abortionist. . . . He lives upon the crushed and mangled bodies of tender, breathless infants.” The authors of *Light on Dark Corners*, a book of advice on the sexual instruction of youth, alluded to “the hecatombs of infants that are annually sacrificed to Moloch” as a result of “this monstrous crime.”

Anti-abortionists made arguments based both on “the right to life” and on the slippery slope to “post-natal child-murder.” And contrary to the brief’s assertions, both judicial opinions and statutes in the nineteenth century recognized fetal personhood. That recognition was implicit in legislators’ decisions, e.g., to increase the punishment for attempted abortion when it could be proven that the attempt had killed a fetus or to group abortion with offenses against children in the criminal code.

The historians’ brief is, in short, an utter fraud, riddled with scholarly abuses and inaccurate conclusions. The historians mischaracterize sources. They misreport facts. They support claims with citations that have no relevance to those claims. They rip quotations out of context. They rely on discredited sources—even on sources that signatories to the brief have themselves discredited. They contradict sources on which they rely heavily and which signatories wrote, without a word of explanation or any retraction by those authors elsewhere. Sylvia A. Law, one of the lawyers who submitted the brief, later declared in a forum that “there is tension between truth-telling and advocacy.” An examination of the brief suggests how its drafters resolved that tension.

By signing the brief, historians specializing in subjects covered by it (e.g., Degler, Freedman, and Gordon) endorsed beliefs they do not hold. Mohr’s case is particularly egregious, though he at least declined to sign the Casey version of the brief. Other historians were simply ignorant. Signatories included authorities on the history of architecture, early modern France, and North China. Luminaries like Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, for instance, both signed the Casey brief but are hardly experts in the field. Yet signatories asked the Supreme Court to pay attention to their claims about the history of abortion law because of their professional credentials.

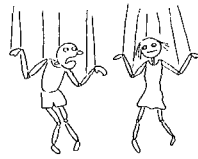
And the brief has had great influence. Press coverage in 1989 tended to assume the accuracy of its claims. Legal scholar Walter Dellinger, now an assistant attorney general in the Clinton Administration, devoted most of an article in *The New Republic* to an uncritical summary of it. Even George Will, an opponent of the doctrine of *Roe*, wrote a column that largely accepted the brief's factual account (while questioning its legal conclusions). In *The New York Review of Books*, legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin wrote, "the best historical evidence shows" that "anti-abortion laws, which were not prevalent in the United States before the middle of the nineteenth century, were adopted to protect the health of the mother and the privileges of the medical profession, not out of any recognition of a fetus's rights." A footnote revealed that by "best historical evidence" Dworkin meant the historians' brief. He used its argument to support his contention that fetuses have never had the status of "constitutional persons." Dworkin repeated this argument, again citing the brief, in his 1993 book *Life's Dominion*.

Laurence Tribe, the prominent constitutional theorist, consulted the brief extensively for his book *Abortion: The Clash of Absolutes*. At the opening of a chapter on "Two Centuries of Abortion in America," he drew on the brief to make a philosophical point about the historicity of moral conflicts:

Current debate in America concerning abortion appears to pose an insoluble conflict between two fundamental values: the right of the fetus to live and the right of the woman to determine her own fate. . . . [But] these competing values are in significant part peculiar to late-twentieth-century America. Far from being inevitable outgrowths of the natural order of things, these competing values are socially constructed.

In the first footnote to this chapter, Tribe described the brief as "the point of departure for much of this chapter."

When the brief was first publicized in 1989, an article in *The Nation*, the left-wing weekly, exulted, "The signatures on this *amicus* brief, many those of eminent mainstream scholars, signal a coming of age for the historians who have entered the field since the 1960s." They certainly do.



'Do you believe in the puppeteer?'

THE SPECTATOR 25 November 1995

Is “atonement” enough?

## *Our Bodies, Our Souls: a Symposium*

Evidently Sir Alec Guinness is as kindly a man offstage as on; excerpts from his 1995 diary have been running in the London *Sunday Telegraph*, and we were struck by this entry for April 13:

Today’s *Telegraph* carries an account of aborted human foetuses being sold in China for human consumption: “Mostly used in soups,” the article says, “with just a touch of ginger.” I’m not sure I shall be able to eat ginger again.

We couldn’t help but think of Miss Naomi Wolf’s article “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” and wonder whether anyone who reads it will ever be able to think about abortion again in the same way as *before* reading it. For Miss Wolf too has looked into the horror that many others refuse to see, or simply pass over without sufficient reflection, as Wolf herself presumably had. Whereas now she sees clearly that she and her fellow feminists—because they employ “a rhetoric about abortion in which there is no life and no death”—are in danger of “losing what can only be called our souls.”

Strong stuff: “souls” aren’t much mentioned by those who support the “right” to abortion, nor any other words that speak to the humanness of the “fetus” before or after it is plucked from the womb. Such words can lead to uncomfortable conclusions, as for instance Miss Wolf’s own: that “passionate feminists” ought to be “commemorating and saying goodbye to the dead.”

Along the way, she says a great deal more, which is why we thought that the reader should hear her out before getting the commentaries assembled here; we’re pleased that she agreed to let us reprint her article just as it appeared in *The New Republic* last October. We confess to having been surprised to see it there: up to now, “pro-choice” publications have chosen not to run serious indictments of their own editorial positions—but then that is Miss Wolf’s *point*, and we commend *TNR*’s editors for letting her make it.

Of course Miss Wolf insists that she has not abandoned her pro-abortion views, as does our first commentator, Professor Marjorie Maguire. However, she too has come to have problems with “pro-choice” rhetoric, having concluded that the *morality* of abortion is *not* a matter of choice. But then Professor Maguire has also had problems of another kind: hers is a very interesting story, well told.

Like Miss Wolf, Professor George McKenna is now well-known to partisans in the Abortion War for having published a seminal article in an unexpected place: his “On Abortion: A Lincolnian Position” ran in *The Atlantic Monthly* last September (it was also reprinted in our *Fall*, 1995 issue). So it seems fitting that he should begin the critique of Miss Wolf’s argument, which he does with gusto, not least *re* her use of not only “soul” but also “sin”—another rarity in the

## INTRODUCTION

abortion context. But as you will see, he thinks Miss Wolf has done a most commendable job, which he hopes she will complete in due course.

Next comes our friend William McGurn, who writes from Hong Kong nowadays; he begins “Give Naomi Wolf her due”—and he does, for her remarkable “candor and lack of evasion.” But he doubts her argument—hope, really—that a change in rhetoric will appeal to the “mushy middle” supposedly undecided on the morality of abortion: “Were Americans to begin to look more closely into the actual circumstances of most abortions, it is unlikely that the result would be a boost for the pro-abortion side.” Indeed, McGurn says, abortion has been protected “by the public’s desire not to know more than it *has* to”—which is why abortion proponents “maintain their absolutist line.”

The view in Britain is quite different, as our friend Lynette Burrows, a well-known journalist, makes clear. Over there, she says, nobody would argue “that abortion is a *good* thing”—yet Wolf describes the “understandable exhilaration” of some feminists determined to abort themselves—to avoid “male doctors”! To Burrows, this brings to mind “human sacrifices” made to “atone” for evil. (Did the Aztecs practice abortion too? We’ll have to investigate that.)

Then Mrs. Rebecca Teti adds her “Kudos to Naomi Wolf” for having the courage of her senses: “the fetus is a baby.” But Teti fails to understand Wolf’s “continuing support for abortion” which in fact undermines what feminists supposedly “long for”—a society in which “gender is no barrier.” The *political* reality is, abortion “substitutes the principle that might makes right for the equality of all human beings” on which “the equality of women” depends.

Our old friend (and former contributing editor) Ellen Wilson Fielding focuses on the “unmistakable emotion” Miss Wolf brings to her plea that feminists “mourn the evil” of abortion—but each time Wolf comes near “a truly bold leap into traditional morality” she “immediately draws back from the implications” of her own arguments and “scuttles away before we can press her further.” Which shows us that “feelings are not enough”—Lincoln was right, Ellen says, “when he said we do not have a right to do wrong.”

Miss Wolf’s article received quite a lot of attention in England, where the London *Times* headlined “The right to choose wrong” over a story that included this analysis: “Wolf has not joined the enemy camp. What she has done is realise that abortion is an awful, disturbing, scarring decision for a woman.”

Mr. Richard Brookhiser concludes our commentaries with the modest admission that he can “only offer the thoughts of one American man”—which he proceeds to do with his trademark sharpness. For instance, he concludes that Wolf’s advice can at best convince aborting women that “*Only good people . . . can feel as badly as we do*”—more likely, he says, it “foreshadows a softer line on abortion,” one that is moving from *Roe v. Wade* “backwards towards the Declaration of Independence.” Being quite unable to improve on *that*, we’ll do the sensible thing and stop delaying your reading it all for yourself. —JPM

## Our Bodies, Our Souls

Naomi Wolf

*I had an abortion when I was a single mother and my daughter was 2 years old. I would do it again. But you know how in the Greek myths when you kill a relative you are pursued by the furies? For months, it was as if baby furies were pursuing me.*

These are not the words of a benighted, superstition-ridden teenager lost in America's cultural backwaters. They are the words of a Cornell-educated, urban-dwelling, Democratic-voting 40-year old cardiologist—I'll call her Clare. Clare is exactly the kind of person for whom being pro-choice is an unshakeable conviction. If there were a core constituent of the movement to secure abortion rights, Clare would be it. And yet: her words are exactly the words to which the pro-choice movement is not listening.

At its best, feminism defends its moral high ground by being simply faithful to the truth: to women's real-life experiences. But, to its own ethical and political detriment, the pro-choice movement has relinquished the moral frame around the issue of abortion. It has ceded the language of right and wrong to abortion foes. The movement's abandonment of what Americans have always, and rightly, demanded of their movements—an ethical core—and its reliance instead on a political rhetoric in which the fetus means nothing are proving fatal.

The effects of this abandonment can be measured in two ways. First of all, such a position causes us to lose political ground. By refusing to look at abortion within a moral framework, we lose the millions of Americans who want to support abortion as a legal right but still need to condemn it as a moral iniquity. Their ethical allegiances are then addressed by the pro-life movement, which is willing to speak about good and evil:

But we are also in danger of losing something more important than votes; we stand in jeopardy of losing what can only be called our souls. Clinging to a rhetoric about abortion in which there is no life and no death, we entangle our beliefs in a series of self-delusions, fibs and evasions. And we risk becoming precisely what our critics charge us with being: callous, selfish and casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of human life.

---

Naomi Wolf is a well-known feminist writer (and author of the best-selling *The Beauty Myth*) whose latest book is *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century* (Ballantine). This article first appeared in *The New Republic* magazine (October 16, 1995) and is reprinted here in its entirety with the author's permission (all rights reserved).

In the following pages, I will argue for a radical shift in the pro-choice movement's rhetoric and consciousness about abortion: I will maintain that we need to contextualize the fight to defend abortion rights within a moral framework that admits that the death of a fetus is a real death; that there are degrees of culpability, judgment and responsibility involved in the decision to abort a pregnancy; that the best understanding of feminism involves holding women as well as men to the responsibilities that are inseparable from their rights; and that we need to be strong enough to acknowledge that this country's high rate of abortion—which ends more than a quarter of all pregnancies—can only be rightly understood as what Dr. Henry Foster was brave enough to call it: “a failure.”

Any doubt that our current pro-choice rhetoric leads to disaster should be dispelled by the famous recent defection of the woman who had been Jane Roe. What happened to Norma McCorvey? To judge by her characterization in the elite media and by some prominent pro-choice feminists, nothing very important. Her change of heart about abortion was relentlessly “explained away” as having everything to do with the girlish motivations of insecurity, fickleness and the need for attention, and little to do with any actual moral agency.

This dismissive (and, not incidently, sexist and classist) interpretation was so highly colored by subjective impressions offered up by the very institutions that define objectivity that it bore all the hallmarks of an exculpatory cultural myth: poor Norma—she just needed stroking. She was never very stable, the old dear—first she was a chess-piece for the pro-choice movement (“just some anonymous person who suddenly emerges,” in the words of one NOW member) and then a codependent of the Bible-thumpers. Low self-esteem, a history of substance abuse, ignorance—these and other personal weaknesses explained her turnaround.

To me, the first commandment of real feminism is: when in doubt, listen to women. What if we were to truly, respectfully listen to this woman who began her political life as, in her words, just “some little old Texas girl who got in trouble”? We would have to hear this: perhaps Norma McCorvey actually had a revelation that she could no longer live as the symbol of a belief system she increasingly repudiated.

Norma McCorvey should be seen as an object lesson for the pro-choice movement—a call to us to search our souls and take another, humbler look at how we go about what we are doing. For McCorvey is in fact an American Everywoman: she is the lost middle of the abortion debate, the woman whose allegiance we forfeit by our refusal to use a darker and sterner and more honest moral rhetoric.



McCorvey is more astute than her critics; she seems to understand better than the pro-choice activists she worked with just what the woman-in-the-middle believes: “I believe in the woman’s right to choose. I’m like a lot of people. I’m in the mushy middle,” she said. McCorvey still supports abortion rights through the first trimester—but is horrified by the brutality of abortion as it manifests more obviously further into a pregnancy. She does not respect the black-and-white ideology on either side and insists on referring instead, as I understand her explanation, to her conscience. What McCorvey and other Americans want and deserve is an abortion-rights movement willing publicly to mourn the evil—necessary evil though it may be—that is abortion. We must have a movement that acts with moral accountability and without euphemism.

With the pro-choice rhetoric we use now, we incur three destructive consequences—two ethical, one strategic: hardness of heart, lying and political failure.

Because of the implications of a Constitution that defines rights according to the legal idea of “a person,” the abortion debate has tended to focus on the question of “personhood” of the fetus. Many pro-choice advocates developed a language to assert that the fetus isn’t a person, and this, over the years, has developed into a lexicon of dehumanization. Laura Kaplan’s *The Story of Jane*, an important forthcoming account of a pre-*Roe* underground abortion service, inadvertently sheds light on the origins of some of this rhetoric: service staffers referred to the fetus—well into the fourth month—as “material” (as in “the amount of material that had to be removed . . .”). The activists felt exhilaration at learning to perform abortions themselves instead of relying on male doctors: “When [a staffer] removed the speculum and said, ‘There, all done,’ the room exploded in excitement.” In an era when women were dying of illegal abortions, this was the understandable exhilaration of an underground resistance movement.

Unfortunately, though, this cool and congratulatory rhetoric lingers into a very different present. In one woman’s account of her chemical abortion, in the January/February 1994 issue of *Mother Jones*, for example, the doctor says, “By Sunday you won’t see on the monitor *what we call the heartbeat*” (my italics). The author of the article, D. Redman, explains that one of the drugs the doctor administered would “end the growth of the fetal tissue.” And we all remember Dr. Joycelyn Elders’s remark, hailed by some as refreshingly frank and pro-woman, but which I found remarkably brutal: that “We really need to get over this love affair with the fetus. . . .”

How did we arrive at this point? In the early 1970s, Second Wave feminism

adopted this rhetoric in response to the reigning ideology in which motherhood was invoked as an excuse to deny women legal and social equality. In a climate in which women risked being defined as mere vessels while their fetuses were given “personhood” at their expense, it made sense that women’s advocates would fight back by depersonalizing the fetus.

The feminist complaint about the pro-life movement’s dehumanization of the pregnant woman in relation to the humanized fetus is familiar and often quite valid: pro-choice commentators note that the pro-life film *The Silent Scream* portrayed the woman as “a vessel”; Ellen Frankfort’s *Vaginal Politics*, the influential feminist text, complained that the fetus is treated like an astronaut in a spaceship.

But, say what you will, pregnancy confounds Western philosophy’s idea of the autonomous self: the pregnant woman is in fact both a person in her body and a vessel. Rather than seeing both beings as alive and interdependent—seeing life within life—and acknowledging that sometimes, nonetheless, the woman must choose her life over the fetus’s, Second Wave feminists reacted to the dehumanization of women by dehumanizing the creatures within them. In the death-struggle to wrest what Simone de Beauvoir called transcendence out of biological immanence, some feminists developed a rhetoric that defined the unwanted fetus as at best valueless; at worst an adversary, a “mass of dependent protoplasm.”

Yet that has left us with a bitter legacy. For when we defend abortion rights by emptying the act of moral gravity we find ourselves cultivating a hardness of heart.

Having become pregnant through her partner’s and her own failure to use a condom, Redman remarks that her friend Judith, who has been trying to find a child to adopt, begs her to carry the pregnancy to term. Judith offers Redman almost every condition a birth-mother could want: “‘Let me have the baby,’” she quotes her friend pleading. “‘You could visit her anytime, and if you ever wanted her back, I promise I would let her go.’” Redman does not mention considering this possibility. Thinking, rather, about the difficulty of keeping the child—“My time consumed by the tedious, daily activities that I’ve always done my best to avoid. Three meals a day. Unwashed laundry . . .”—she schedules her chemical abortion.

The procedure is experimental, and the author feels “almost heroic,” thinking of how she is blazing a trail for other women. After the abortion process is underway, the story reaches its perverse epiphany: Redman is on a Women’s Day march when the blood from the abortion first appears. She exults at this: “‘Our bodies, our lives, our right to decide.’ . . . My life feels luxuriant with possibility. For one precious moment, I believe

that we have the power to dismantle this system. I finish the march, borne along by the women. . . ." As for the pleading Judith with everything she was ready to offer a child, and the phantom baby? They are both off-stage, silent in this chilling drama of "feminist" triumphalism.

And why should we expect otherwise? In this essay, the fetus (as the author writes, "the now-inert material from my womb") is little more than a form of speech: a vehicle to assert the author's identity and autonomy.

The pro-life warning about the potential of widespread abortion to degrade reverence for life does have a nugget of truth: a free-market rhetoric about abortion can, indeed, contribute to the eerie situation we are now facing, wherein the culture seems increasingly to see babies not as creatures to whom parents devote their lives but as accoutrements to enhance parental quality of life. Day by day, babies seem to have less value in themselves, in a matrix of the sacred, than they do as products with a value dictated by a market economy.

Stories surface regularly about "worthless" babies left naked on gratings or casually dropped out of windows, while "valuable," genetically correct babies are created at vast expense and with intricate medical assistance for infertile couples. If we fail to treat abortion with grief and reverence, we risk forgetting that, when it comes to the children we choose to bear, we are here to serve them—whomever they are; they are not here to serve us.

Too often our rhetoric leads us to tell untruths. What Norma McCorvey wants, it seems, is for abortion-rights advocates to face, really face, what we are doing: "Have you ever seen a second-trimester abortion?" she asks. "It's a baby. It's got a face and a body, and they put him in a freezer and a little container."

Well, so it does; and so they do.

The pro-choice movement often treats with contempt the pro-lifers' practice of holding up to our faces their disturbing graphics. We revile their placards showing an enlarged scene of the aftermath of a D & C abortion; we are disgusted by their lapel pins with the little feet, crafted in gold, of a 10-week-old fetus; we mock the sensationalism of *The Silent Scream*. We look with pity and horror at someone who would brandish a fetus in formaldehyde—and we are quick to say that they are lying: "Those are stillbirths, anyway," we tell ourselves.

To many pro-choice advocates, the imagery is revolting propaganda. There is a sense among us, let us be frank, that the gruesomeness of the imagery *belongs* to the pro-lifers; that it emerges from the dark, frightening minds of fanatics; that it represents the violence of imaginations that

would, given half a chance, turn our world into a scary, repressive place. "People like us" see such material as the pornography of the pro-life movement.

But feminism at its best is based on what is simply true. While pro-lifers have not been beyond dishonesty, distortion and the doctoring of images (preferring, for example, to highlight the results of very late, very rare abortions), many of those photographs are in fact photographs of actual D & Cs; those footprints are in fact the footprints of a 10-week old fetus; the pro-life slogan, "Abortion stops a beating heart," is incontrovertibly true. While images of violent fetal death work magnificently for pro-lifers as political polemic, the pictures are not polemical in themselves: they are biological facts. We know this.

Since abortion became legal nearly a quarter-century ago, the fields of embryology and perinatology have been revolutionized—but the pro-choice view of the contested fetus has remained static. This has led to a bizarre bifurcation in the way we who are pro-choice tend to think about wanted as opposed to unwanted fetuses; the unwanted ones are still seen in schematic black-and-white drawings while the wanted ones have metamorphosed into vivid and moving color. Even while Elders spoke of our need to "get over" our love affair with the unwelcome fetus, an entire growth industry—Mozart for your belly; framed sonogram photos; home fetal-heartbeat stethoscopes—is devoted to sparking fetal love affairs in other circumstances, and aimed especially at the hearts of overscheduled yuppies. If we avidly cultivate love for the ones we bring to term, and "get over" our love for the ones we don't, do we not risk developing a hydroponic view of babies—and turn them into a product we can cull for our convenience?

Any happy couple with a wanted pregnancy and a copy of *What to Expect When You're Expecting* can see the cute, detailed drawings of the fetus whom the book's owner presumably is not going to abort, and can read the excited descriptions of what that fetus can do and feel, month by month. Anyone who has had a sonogram during pregnancy knows perfectly well that the 4-month-old fetus responds to outside stimulus—"Let's get him to look this way," the technician will say, poking gently at the belly of a delighted mother-to-be. *The Well Baby Book*, the kind of whole-grain, holistic guide to pregnancy and childbirth that would find its audience among the very demographic that is most solidly pro-choice reminds us that: "Increasing knowledge is increasing the awe and respect we have for the unborn baby as a real person long before birth. . . ."

So, what will it be: Wanted fetuses are charming, complex, REM-dreaming little beings whose profile on the sonogram looks just like Daddy, but

unwanted ones are mere “uterine material”? How can we charge that it is vile and repulsive for pro-lifers to brandish vile and repulsive images if the images are real? To insist that the truth is in poor taste is the very height of hypocrisy. Besides, if these images *are* often the facts of the matter, and if we then claim that it is offensive for pro-choice women to be confronted by them, then we are making the judgment that women are too inherently weak to face a truth about which they have to make a grave decision. This view of women is unworthy of feminism. Free women must be strong women, too; and strong women, presumably, do not seek to cloak their most important decisions in euphemism.

Other lies are not lies to others, but to ourselves. An abortion-clinic doctor, Elizabeth Karlin, who wrote a recent “Hers” column in *The New York Times*, declared that “There is only one reason I’ve ever heard for having an abortion: the desire to be a good mother.”

While that may well be true for many poor and working-class women—and indeed research shows that poor women are three times more likely to have abortions than are better-off women—the elite, who are the most vociferous in their morally unambiguous pro-choice language, should know perfectly well how untrue that statement often is in their own lives. All abortions occupy a spectrum, from full lack of alternatives to full moral accountability. Karlin and many other pro-choice activists try to situate all women equally at the extreme endpoint of that spectrum, and it just isn’t so. Many women, including middle-class women, do have abortions because, as one such woman put it, “They have a notion of what a good mother is and don’t feel they can be that kind of mother at this phase of their lives.” In many cases, that is still a morally defensible place on the spectrum; but it is not the place of absolute absolutism that Dr. Karlin claims it to be. It is, rather, a place of moral struggle, of self-interest mixed with selflessness, of wished-for good intermingled with necessary evil.

Other abortions occupy places on the spectrum that are far more culpable. Of the abortions I know of, these were some of the reasons: to find out if the woman could get pregnant; to force a boy or man to take a relationship more seriously; and, again and again, to enact a rite of passage for affluent teenage girls. In my high school, the abortion drama was used to test a boyfriend’s character. Seeing if he would accompany the girl to the operation or, better yet, come up with the money for the abortion could almost have been the 1970s Bay Area equivalent of the ’50s fraternity pin.

The affluent teenage couples who conceive because they can and then erase the consequences—and the affluent men and women who choose

abortion because they were careless or in a hurry or didn't like the feel of latex—are not the moral equivalent of the impoverished mother who responsibly, even selflessly, acknowledges she already has too many mouths to feed. Feminist rights include feminist responsibilities; the right to obtain an abortion brings with it the responsibility to contracept. Fifty-seven percent of unintended pregnancies come about because the parents used no contraception at all. Those millions certainly include women and men too poor to buy contraception, girls and boys too young and ill-informed to know where to get it, and countless instances of marital rape, coerced sex, incest and couplings in which the man refused to let the woman use protection.

But they also include millions of college students, professional men and women, and middle- and upper-middle-class people (11 percent of abortions are obtained by people in households with incomes higher than \$50,000)—who have no excuse whatsoever for their carelessness. “There is only one reason I’ve ever heard for having an abortion: the desire to be a good mother”—this is a falsehood that condescends to women struggling to be true agents of their own souls, even as it dishonors through hypocrisy the terminations that are the writer’s subject.

Not to judge other men and women without judging myself, I know this assertion to be false from my own experience. Once, I made the choice to take a morning-after pill. The heavily pregnant doctor looked at me, as she dispensed it, as if I were the scum of the earth.

If what was going on in my mind had been mostly about the well-being of the possible baby, that pill would never have been swallowed. For that potential baby, brought to term, would have had two sets of loving middle-income grandparents, an adult mother with an education and even, as I discovered later, the beginning of diaper money for its first two years of life (the graduate fellowship I was on forbade marriage but, frozen in time before women were its beneficiaries, said nothing about unwed motherhood). Because of the baby’s skin color, even if I chose not to rear the child, a roster of eager adoptive parents awaited him or her. If I had been thinking only or even primarily about the baby’s life, I would have had to decide to bring the pregnancy, had there been one, to term.

No: there were two columns in my mind—“Me” and “Baby”—and the first won out. And what was in it looked something like this: unwelcome intensity in the relationship with the father; desire to continue to “develop as a person” before “real” parenthood; wish to encounter my eventual life partner without the off-putting encumbrance of a child; resistance to curtailing the nature of the time remaining to me in Europe. Essentially, this column came down to: I am not done being responsive only to myself yet.

At even the possibility that the cosmos was calling my name, I cowered and stepped aside. I was not so unlike those young louts who father children and run from the specter of responsibility. Except that my refusal to be involved with this potential creature was as definitive as a refusal can be.

Stepping aside in this way is analogous to draft evasion; there are good and altruistic reasons to evade the draft, and then there are self-preserving reasons. In that moment, feminism came to one of its logical if less-than-inspiring moments of fruition: I chose to sidestep biology; I acted—and was free to act—as if I were in control of my destiny, the way men more often than women have let themselves act. I chose myself on my own terms over a possible someone else, for self-absorbed reasons. But “to be a better mother”? “*Dulce et decorum est . . .*”? Nonsense.

Now, freedom means that women must be free to choose self or to choose selfishly. Certainly for a woman with fewer economic and social choices than I had—for instance, a woman struggling to finish her higher education, without which she would have little hope of a life worthy of her talents—there can indeed be an *obligation* to choose self. And the defense of some level of abortion rights as fundamental to women’s integrity and equality has been made fully by others, including, quite effectively, Ruth Bader Ginsberg. There is no easy way to deny the powerful argument that a woman’s equality in society must give her some irreducible rights unique to her biology, including the right to take the life within her life.

But we don’t have to lie to ourselves about what we are doing at such a moment. Let us at least look with clarity at what that means and not whitewash self-interest with the language of self-sacrifice. The landscape of many such decisions looks more like Marin County than Verdun. Let us certainly not be fools enough to present such spiritually limited moments to the world with a flourish of pride, pretending that we are somehow pioneers and heroines and even martyrs to have snatched the self, with its aims and pleasures, from the pressure of biology.

That decision was not my finest moment. The least I can do, in honor of the being that might have been, is simply to know that.

Using amoral rhetoric, we weaken ourselves politically because we lose the center. To draw an inexact parallel, many people support the choice to limit the medical prolongation of life. But, if a movement arose that spoke of our “getting over our love affair” with the terminally ill, those same people would recoil into a vociferous interventionist position as a way to

assert their moral values. We would be impoverished by a rhetoric about the end of life that speaks of the ill and the dying as if they were meaningless and of doing away with them as if it were a bracing demonstration of our personal independence.

Similarly, many people support necessary acts of warfare (Catholics for a Free Choice makes the analogy between abortion rights and such warfare). There are legal mechanisms that allow us to bring into the world the evil of war. But imagine how quickly public opinion would turn against a president who waged war while asserting that our sons and daughters were nothing but cannon fodder. Grief and respect are the proper tones for all discussions about choosing to endanger or destroy a manifestation of life.

War is legal; it is sometimes even necessary. Letting the dying die in peace is often legal and sometimes even necessary. Abortion should be legal; it is sometimes even necessary. Sometimes the mother must be able to decide that the fetus, in its full humanity, must die. But it is never right or necessary to minimize the value of the lives involved or the sacrifice incurred in letting them go. Only if we uphold abortion rights within a matrix of individual conscience, atonement and responsibility can we both correct the logical and ethical absurdity in our position—and consolidate the support of the center.

Many others, of course, have wrestled with this issue: Camille Paglia, who has criticized the “convoluted casuistry” of some pro-choice language; Roger Rosenblatt, who has urged us to permit but discourage abortion; Laurence Tribe, who has noted that we place the fetus in shadow in order to advance the pro-choice argument. But we have yet to make room for this conversation at the table of mainstream feminism.

And we can’t wait much longer. Historical changes—from the imminent availability of cheap chemical abortifacients to the ascendancy of the religious right to Norma McCorvey’s defection—make the need for a new abortion-rights language all the more pressing.

In a time of retrenchment, how can I be so sure that a more honest and moral rhetoric about abortion will consolidate rather than scuttle abortion rights? Look at what Americans themselves say. When a recent *Newsweek* poll asked about support for abortion using the rare phrasing, “It’s a matter between a woman, her doctor, her family, her conscience and her God,” a remarkable 72 percent of the respondents called that formulation “about right.” This represents a gain of thirty points over the abortion-rights support registered in the latest Gallup poll, which asked about abortion without using the words “God” or “conscience.” When participants in the Gallup poll were asked if they supported abortion “under any circumstances” only



32 percent agreed; only 9 percent more supported it under “most” circumstances. Clearly, abortion rights are safest when we are willing to submit them to a morality beyond just our bodies and our selves.

But how, one might ask, can I square a recognition of the humanity of the fetus, and the moral gravity of destroying it, with a pro-choice position? The answer can only be found in the context of a paradigm abandoned by the left and misused by the right: the paradigm of sin and redemption.

It was when I was four months pregnant, sick as a dog, and in the middle of an argument, that I realized I could no longer tolerate the fetus-is-nothing paradigm of the pro-choice movement. I was being interrogated by a conservative, and the subject of abortion rights came up. “You’re four months pregnant,” he said. “Are you going to tell me that’s not a baby you’re carrying?”

The accepted pro-choice response at such a moment in the conversation is to evade: to move as swiftly as possible to a discussion of “privacy” and “difficult personal decisions” and “choice.” Had I not been so nauseated and so cranky and so weighed down with the physical gravity of what was going on inside me, I might not have told what is the truth for me. “Of course it’s a baby,” I snapped. And went rashly on: “And if I found myself in circumstances in which I had to make the terrible decision to end this life, then that would be between myself and God.”

Startlingly to me, two things happened: the conservative was quiet; I had said something that actually made sense to him. And I felt the great relief that is the grace of long-delayed honesty.

Now, the G-word is certainly a problematic element to introduce into the debate. And yet “God” or “soul”—or, if you are secular and prefer it, “conscience”—is precisely what is missing from pro-choice discourse. There is a crucial difference between “myself and my God” or “my conscience”—terms that imply moral accountability—and “myself and my doctor,” the phrasing that Justice Harry Blackmun’s wording in *Roe* (“inherently, and primarily, a medical decision”) has tended to promote in the pro-choice movement. And that’s not even to mention “between myself and myself” (Elders: “It’s not anybody’s business if I went for an abortion”), which implies just the relativistic relationship to abortion that our critics accuse us of sustaining.

The language we use to make our case limits the way we let ourselves think about abortion. As a result of the precedents in *Roe* (including *Griswold v. Connecticut* and *Eisenstadt v. Baird*), which based a woman’s

right to an abortion on the Ninth and Fourteenth Amendments' implied right to personal privacy, other unhelpful terms are also current in our discourse. Pro-choice advocates tend to cast an abortion as "an intensely personal decision." To which we can say, No: one's choice of *carpeting* is an intensely personal decision. One's struggles with a life-and-death issue must be understood as a matter of personal conscience. There is a world of difference between the two, and it's the difference a moral frame makes.

Stephen L. Carter has pointed out that spiritual discussion has been robbed of a place in American public life. As a consequence we tend—often disastrously—to use legislation to work out right and wrong. That puts many in the position of having to advocate against abortion rights in order to proclaim their conviction that our high rate of avoidable abortion (one of the highest in developed countries, five times that of the Netherlands, for example) is a social evil; and, conversely, many must pretend that abortion is not a transgression of any kind if we wish to champion abortion rights. We have no ground on which to say that abortion is a necessary evil that should be faced and opposed in the realm of conscience and action and even soul; yet remain legal.

But American society is struggling to find its way forward to a discourse of right and wrong that binds together a common ethic for the secular and the religious. When we do that, we create a moral discourse that can exist in its own right independent of legislation, and we can find ground to stand upon.

Norma McCorvey explained what happened to her in terms of good and evil: she woke in the middle of the night and felt a presence pushing violently down on her. "I denounce you, Satan," she announced. This way of talking about evil is one of the chief class divisions in America: working-class people talk about Satan, and those whom Paul Fussell calls "the X group"—those who run the country—talk instead about neurotic guilt. While the elite scoff at research that shows that most Americans maintain a belief in the embodiment of evil—"the devil"—they miss something profound about the human need to make moral order out of chaos. After all, the only real difference between the experience described by Clare, the Cornell-educated pro-choicer, and McCorvey, the uneducated alcoholic, is a classical allusion.

There is a hunger for a moral framework that we pro-choicers must reckon with. In the Karlin "Hers" column, the author announced proudly that pregnant women are asked by the counselor in the office, "So, how long have you been pro-choice?" Dr. Karlin writes that "Laughter and the answer, 'About ten minutes,' is the healthiest response. 'I still don't believe

in abortion,' some women say, unaware that refusal to take responsibility for the decision means that I won't do the procedure."

How is this "feminist" ideological coercion any different from the worst of pro-life shaming and coercion? The women who come to a clinic that is truly feminist—that respects women—are entitled not only to their abortions but also to their sense of sin.

To use the term "sin" in this context does not necessarily mean, as Dr. Karlin believes, that a woman thinks she must go to hell because she is having an abortion. It may mean that she thinks she must face the realization that she has fallen short of who she should be; and that she needs to ask forgiveness for that, and atone for it. As I understand such a woman's response, she *is* trying to take responsibility for the decision.

We on the left tend to twitch with discomfort at that word "sin." Too often we have become religiously illiterate, and so we deeply misunderstand the word. But in all of the great religious traditions, our recognition of sin, and then our atonement for it, brings on God's compassion and our redemption. In many faiths, justice is linked, as it is in medieval Judaism and in Buddhism, to compassion. From Yom Kippur and the Ash Wednesday-to-Easter cycle to the Hindu idea of karma, the individual's confrontation with her or his own culpability is the first step toward ways to create and receive more light.

**H**ow could one live with a conscious view that abortion is an evil and still be pro-choice? Through acts of redemption, or what the Jewish mystical tradition calls *tikkun*; or "mending." Laurence Tribe, in *Abortion: The Clash of Absolutes*, notes that "Memorial services for the souls of aborted fetuses are fairly common in contemporary Japan," where abortions are both legal and readily available. Shinto doctrine holds that women should make offerings to the fetus to help it rest in peace; Buddhists once erected statues of the spirit guardian of children to honor aborted fetuses (called "water children" or "unseeing children"). If one believes that abortion is killing and yet is still pro-choice, one could try to use contraception for every single sex act; if one had to undergo an abortion, one could then work to provide contraception, or jobs, or other choices to young girls; one could give money to programs that provide prenatal care to poor women; if one is a mother or father, one can remember the aborted child every time one is tempted to be less than loving—and give renewed love to the living child. And so on: *tikkun*.

But when you insist, as the "Hers" column writer did, on stripping people of their sense of sin, they react with a wholesale backing-away into a rigid

morality that reimposes order: hence, the ascendancy of the religious right.

Just look at the ill-fated nomination of Dr. Henry Foster for Surgeon General. The Republicans said “abortion,” and the discussion was over. The Democrats, had they worked out a moral framework for progressivism, could have responded: “Yes: our abortion rate is a terrible social evil. Here is a man who can help put a moral framework around the chaos of a million and a half abortions a year. He can bring that rate of evil down. And whichever senator among you has ever prevented an unplanned pregnancy—and Dr. Foster has—let him ask the first question.”

Who gets blamed for our abortion rate? The ancient Hebrews had a ritual of sending a “scapegoat” into the desert with the community’s sins projected upon it. Abortion doctors are our contemporary scapegoats. The pro-lifers obviously scapegoat them in one way: if pro-lifers did to women what they do to abortion doctors—harassed and targeted them in their homes and workplaces—public opinion would rapidly turn against them; for the movement would soon find itself harassing the teachers and waitresses, housewives and younger sisters of their own communities. The pro-life movement would have to address the often all-too-pressing good reasons that lead good people to abort. That would be intolerable, a tactical defeat for the pro-life movement, and as sure to lose it “the mushy middle” as the pro-choice movement’s tendency toward rhetorical coldness loses it the same constituency.

But pro-choicers, too, scapegoat the doctors and clinic workers. By resisting a moral framework in which to view abortion we who are pro-abortion-rights leave the doctors in the front lines, with blood on their hands: the blood of the repeat abortions—at least 43 percent of the total; the suburban summer country-club rite-of-passage abortions; the “I don’t know what came over me, it was such good Chardonnay” abortions; as well as the blood of the desperate and the unpreventable and accidental and the medically necessary and the violently conceived abortions. This is blood that the doctors and clinic workers often see clearly, and that they heroically rinse and cause to flow and rinse again. And they take all our sins, the pro-choice as well as the pro-life among us, upon themselves.

And we who are pro-choice compound their isolation by declaring that that blood is not there.

As the world changes and women, however incrementally, become more free and more powerful, the language in which we phrase the goals of feminism must change as well. As a result of the bad old days before the Second Wave of feminism, we tend to understand abortion as a desperately needed exit from near-total male control of our reproductive lives.

This scenario posits an unambiguous chain of power and powerlessness in which men control women and women, in order to survive, must have unquestioned control over fetuses. It is this worldview, all too real in its initial conceptualization, that has led to the dread among many pro-choice women of departing from a model of woman-equals-human-life, fetus-equals-not-much.

This model of reality may have been necessary in an unrelenting patriarchy. But today, in what should be, as women continue to consolidate political power, a patriarchy crumbling in spite of itself, it can become obsolete.

Now: try to imagine real gender equality. Actually, try to imagine an America that is female-dominated, since a true working democracy in this country would reflect our 54-46 voting advantage.

Now imagine such a democracy, in which women would be valued so very highly, as a world that is accepting and responsible about human sexuality; in which there is no coerced sex without serious jailtime; in which there are affordable, safe contraceptives available for the taking in every public health building; in which there is economic parity for women—and basic economic subsistence for every baby born; and in which every young American woman knows about and understands her natural desire as a treasure to cherish, and responsibly, when the time is right, on her own terms, to share.

In such a world, in which the idea of gender as a barrier has become a dusty artifact, we would probably use a very different language about what would be—then—the rare and doubtless traumatic event of abortion. That language would probably call upon respect and responsibility, grief and mourning. In that world we might well describe the unborn and the never-to-be-born with the honest words of life.

And in that world, passionate feminists might well hold candlelight vigils at abortion clinics, standing shoulder to shoulder with the doctors who work there, commemorating and saying goodbye to the dead.

# Rhetoric and Reality

Marjorie Reiley Maguire

**J**ean Paul Sartre purportedly once said that the greatest evil in the world is to treat as abstract that which is concrete. Naomi Wolf's article criticizing pro-choice rhetoric is a reminder to feminists of the concreteness of fetal life and its rootedness in a woman's body and her psyche. The abstractness of much of pro-choice rhetoric ignores that concreteness, to the detriment of the emotional well-being of the pregnant woman, as well as to the detriment of the moral authority of the women's movement.

Like Naomi Wolf, I write as a pro-choice woman. I am pro-choice regarding the legality of abortion in a pluralistic society, and I think that Justice Blackmun's trimester guidelines in *Roe v. Wade* for determining the legality of abortion are just about right—as *legal* guidelines. However, I do not think that the morality of abortion is or should be a matter of choice. The underlying insight of Naomi Wolf's article is that pro-choice rhetoric tends to move beyond the issue of legality to the issue of morality, and that is where it fails. I agree, and I plead guilty to that failure in my own past rhetoric on abortion.

I was an unlikely spokesperson for the pro-choice position. I have never had an abortion myself or ever been faced with an unwanted pregnancy. I was a “nice Catholic girl” with an excellent Catholic education. I valued marriage and children. I was delighted with my own two pregnancies and eagerly read books on fetal development. I became emotionally pro-choice during my first pregnancy, although I had become intellectually pro-choice a few years earlier.

Before I went to graduate school in theology in the late '60s, I had only encountered the concept of abortion in my junior-year high-school religion book, in a list of sins against the Sixth Commandment. The religion book did not explain what abortion was, so I looked it up in the dictionary. When I found out its meaning, I naively dismissed this “sin” as merely a theoretical one, saying to myself “Who would ever do such a thing?”

In graduate school, abortion was discussed in my moral theology class. At first, I vigorously fought any suggestion that abortion (or euthanasia) could be moral, dutifully reciting the Thomistic principles I had learned in

---

**Marjorie Reiley Maguire** is both a theologian (with a doctorate in religious studies from the Catholic University of America) specializing in ethics, and an attorney (with a doctorate from the University of Wisconsin school of law) who now practices in Milwaukee.

my college theology classes. However, I eventually came to the conclusion that my graduate-school professor was correct in saying that there are few or no absolutes in moral theology, and that the concrete facts of a moral dilemma will affect how conflicting moral principles apply to that situation. I still think that is true. However, I now also see that the departure of moral theology from an emphasis on moral principles has led to a myopic focus on the conflict situations and to the ignoring of the principles themselves. This has produced a “morality of the exception” rather than a morality of the *rule*. It is this morality of the exception that has led to the excesses of pro-choice rhetoric.

My intellectual “conversion” to the view that abortion can be moral did not change my emotional abhorrence of the fact of abortion. In spite of my intellectual appreciation of conflict situations, I was troubled when I heard of a friend’s abortion. This was not because I had arrived at a different intellectual evaluation from hers as to the legitimacy of her application of principles to her conflict situation. It was because I still emotionally rejected abortion itself as a legitimate choice for anyone.

My emotional “conversion” to abortion as a legitimate choice came after *Roe v. Wade*, during my first pregnancy. It came not because I rejected the pregnancy but because I valued my fetus and the experience of pregnancy so much that I felt every woman should be able to welcome a pregnancy this way. Ironically, this led me to understand the emotions of a woman who ends a pregnancy in the early weeks because she cannot welcome the life within her. I concluded that only the woman should make that decision. This conclusion, combined with my genetic Irish suspicion of government power, led me into pro-choice activism.

My pro-choice stance became more personal two years later during my second pregnancy. When I was three months pregnant, I learned that my first child had a rare genetic disorder (Hunter’s Syndrome or Mucopolysaccharidosis II); the prognosis was progressive, serious retardation, and an early death. I also learned that I am a carrier of that disorder. I had amniocentesis and planned to abort if the diagnosis indicated that the fetus I was carrying had the syndrome. Fortunately, I did not have to make that choice, and I have a twenty-year-old son who is the delight of my life. In retrospect, I do not know if I would actually have gone through with an abortion, even if the results of the amniocentesis had been bad. At that time, my first son had not shown the devastating signs of his illness. Thus, I do not think I could have aborted my wanted fetus on the basis of what was still to me an abstract and theoretical medical prognosis.

Since then, my first son died at the age of ten, after years of progressive retardation and, perhaps, some pain in his final year. Yet, even though I now know as a fact, and not just as prognosis, the devastating course my firstborn's life actually took, if I could live my life over again, I would not abort my first son. He was a concrete person who was an integral part of my life, and I would not want my life to have been without him. However, the concrete value of his individual life does not convince me that, if I were carrying a different fetus with his disorder, abortion of that potential person would be wrong. Whether I could actually go through with such an abortion is another question. Since I am sadly beyond childbearing age, fortunately I will never again have to face that dilemma.

While it was a wanted pregnancy and the deterioration and demise of a loved child that made me pro-choice, it was divorce that opened my eyes to problems with the pro-choice position and made me see that much of pro-choice rhetoric is morally bankrupt.

My husband, who was also a pro-choice activist, left me in 1990 for another woman. Before I knew about the other woman, I pleaded with my husband to return to the marriage. I expected our pro-choice friends to rally to my aid. I thought they would confront my husband with the dissonance between his divorce action and his pro-woman rhetoric. Instead, I got a cold shoulder from most of my pro-choice, feminist friends. In effect, I was aborted from their field of concern. They had a man on their side whom they did not want to lose, but I was expendable. I was even asked why I was making a fuss that could hurt "the cause." When I answered that my "cause" was women, not abortion *per se*, I was told that I was mixing up my personal life with public concerns.

When I reminded them that the feminist doctrine is that "the personal is the political," their answer was to drop me entirely. A few even aided my husband in some of his divorce actions against me. So much for the liberationist, feminist rhetoric about the "hermeneutical privilege" of women's experience and the "preferential option" for women as oppressed persons in society!

That experience did not convert me away from a pro-choice legal position. It did not suddenly convince me that a fetus is a person from the first moment of conception, or that a woman who has an abortion, at least in the first trimester, is a baby killer. Nor did it suddenly make me see abortion as bad. I had never seen it as good. However, my experience with these pro-choice feminist friends did pierce the rhetoric for me and make me see the abortion movement in a different light. That different vision



eventually caused me to repudiate my previous association with “Catholics for a Free Choice” and to withdraw my permission for them to use my pro-choice writings. This was not a “conversion” like Norma McCorvey’s. I did not join an anti-abortion group. I did not really even change my views. But I no longer wanted to be associated with this group which I had come to see as having an agenda I did not want to support.

When the actions of my feminist friends revealed to me the consequences of the pro-choice rhetoric, my eyes were opened to aspects of the pro-choice movement that I had not previously considered. I began to see the abortion movement as not so much a pro-woman movement as a pro-sexual-liberation movement. I saw how advocacy for the legality of abortion subtly shifts to moral justification for abortion. That, in turn, promotes a moral neutrality toward the irresponsible sexual behavior which too often is the cause of abortion—“irresponsibility” is a word that is rarely mentioned in pro-choice circles—“contraceptive failure” is presented as the cause of most abortions, rather than sexuality without moral constraints. In this way, abortion rhetoric plays into a degenerate male sexual agenda, rather than promoting the moral agency of women.

By offering incense at the altar of the god Sex, abortion rhetoric tends to redefine love and fulfillment for women. Love is reduced to genital expression. A woman’s fulfillment is divorced from her womb. It has become politically correct to support lesbians, but not to champion the cause of wives and mothers. Although modern culture treats a “controlling person” as a pariah, absolute control over one’s own life, especially one’s sexual life, is set forth as the moral ideal.

As Naomi Wolf confessed was her “sin,” a woman with an unwanted pregnancy but an unsatisfactory relationship with the father thinks she must be able to meet her future partner without the burden of a child. For others, it is an extra child beyond the number of planned that cannot be tolerated, even in a marriage. The idol of control over one’s own life makes earning money seem more important than bearing a child. A woman who is simply a file clerk in an office is seen, strangely, as being more in control of her life—and more fulfilled—than a woman who stays home changing her own baby’s diaper or cleaning her own home.

The preoccupation with control, and with genital sex as fulfillment, has produced a moral schizophrenia in feminism. On the one hand, feminism condemns a man’s use of sexually-suggestive language as “sexual harassment,” if the woman does not welcome it. Yet, on the other hand, feminism will not condemn persons whose sexual behavior results in AIDS or

an unwanted pregnancy. Such political correctness is inconsistent and dishonest.

One of my colleagues in Christian ethics recently told me that she thinks it constitutes harassment of women when those who are against abortion call the fetus a "baby." She does not see that she is engaging in the "feminist ideological coercion" that Naomi Wolf condemns. If a woman who wants an abortion is troubled by reference to the fetus as a "baby," then she should probably be troubled by aborting that fetus. Those who call it a "baby" are doing her a favor, not harassing her.

Although I am a lawyer, and strongly believe in individual rights, I have come to see that there is a problem with rights language as applied to abortion. Rights are good things. Abortion is not good, even if it should be legal. To speak of "abortion rights" is to imply that abortion is a positive value, a badge of feminist courage. However, abortion is always a tragedy, no matter what its justification. Because of rights language, abortion became the keystone of feminist concern, to the detriment of many other issues that affected more women than abortion ever would or should. Abortion rights became the central issue, not only for NARAL (the National Abortion Rights Action League), which was founded to keep abortion legal, but also for NOW (the National Organization for Women) and other feminist groups. NOW should have left abortion to NARAL and then focused on broader issues, such as women's access to jobs and pay equity, or societal recognition of the economic contribution of the woman who stays home to raise her children. Such an agenda would have been better for NOW and better for women.

The use of rights language also tends to depersonalize the fetus at every stage of development. Because the woman's right to abortion is seen as absolute, the fetus can have no rights until it is born. Thus, there are no homicide charges against a drunk driver who causes an accident that makes an eight-month pregnant woman miscarry. Yet, to the woman, a life that was precious to her has been taken. The concreteness of her loss is subsumed under the abstraction of ideology about rights.

Rights language also causes abortion to be seen as an entitlement for a woman. This leads to ignoring the real differences for the pregnant woman, the fetus—and the medical personnel—between an early abortion and an abortion in the second or third trimester. It also leads pro-choice advocates to go beyond arguing for the legality of abortion to arguing that the government should pay for abortions for poor women. The myth is that the poor woman will go on to an exciting future, with a challenging career, if she can only be helped through this one obstacle in her life.

What is needed is a rhetoric for a middle position. My proposal for a middle position is similar to Naomi Wolf's. That is, on the legal level, abortion should not be recriminalized but, on the moral level, abortion should be discussed as a grave moral problem. Moreover, the root cause of most abortions, namely irresponsible sexual behavior, must be discussed with honesty *and* condemned, while the dignity of child-bearing and child-rearing should be honored. This period of a woman's life must not be seen as "putting her talents on hold" until she can work full time in the public sphere.

Naomi Wolf contends that abortion rights must be contextualized within a moral framework. As an ethicist, I agree. However, not all moral frameworks will do. We need to return to a moral framework that articulates a morality of principle rather than a morality of exceptions. While recognizing that moral principles can and often do conflict when being applied to concrete situations, we need to articulate the principles so that their demands are compellingly felt by persons facing difficult moral decisions. The rhetoric of abortion rights has diluted those demands and rendered them practically non-existent.

A morality of principle as applied to abortion will stress the following principles:

- Human life is extremely precious, even when it is pre-personal.
- Women are as valuable as men so women must be treated equally to men.
- Women's reproductive potential is an integral part of their lives so women should not be penalized when they have children.
- Women have a responsibility to the human life that takes root in their wombs.
- Women and men have a responsibility not to engage in sexual behavior that can lead to an unwanted pregnancy.
- Sex belongs only in a committed relationship where new life can be welcomed, even when its creation is unintentional.
- Men who impregnate women have a responsibility to the woman and the fetus to make it possible for the new life to grow and flourish.

Considered in the abstract, or as if they were clearly marked off from each other, each of these principles is absolute and does not permit exceptions. However, they are not separated from each other: they do not form a moral spectrum, but rather a unity. Because the principles are interrelated, when one of them is not followed, it may affect whether there is a

legitimate exception to another principle. The legitimacy of such exceptions can only be judged in the concrete situation. But when the exceptions become the subject of political rhetoric or moral discourse, then the exceptions, rather than the principles, become the rule.

The fault for the problems with abortion rhetoric—and the failure to achieve a “middle position”—does not lie entirely with those in the pro-choice or feminist movement. Feminist rhetoric must be seen as a swing of the pendulum to one extreme. If feminists tend to meld the legal justification for abortion with a moral justification for abortion, it is in reaction to the other swing of the pendulum which demands an absolute conformity between civil law and moral law. If some vocal and influential feminists tend to downplay the dignity of childbearing, it is because some of the voices that are most eloquent in defense of this great gift to women lack credibility when they claim that the complementarity of men and women precludes equal roles for men and women in secular and religious communities. If some feminists depersonalize the fetus, it is because the voices that sacralize the fetus often depersonalize women. If feminists divinize sexual freedom, it is because sex has been demonized in Western culture and religion, and even marital sexual intercourse with a woman has been treated as tainting and defiling a man for service of God.

In a recent television interview, General Colin Powell said that the problem with modern society is that we have ceased to be shocked by things that used to shock us, and that *should* shock us. That sums up the central insight of Naomi Wolf’s article. Abortion used to shock us and should still shock us, even if we are pro-choice as regards the law. What prevents abortion from shocking us is the rhetoric justifying abortion and the pro-choice consciousness that has been transformed by the rhetoric. If we are to solve the problem of abortion in our society, we need a new rhetoric that advocates, not new laws, but adherence to moral principles that respect the value of life, women, and responsible sexuality.

## Wolf Eat Wolf

George McKenna

Do I agree with Naomi Wolf's article? No—and, as Socrates might say, neither does Naomi Wolf.

The article has two parts. The first part makes some of the same points I made in an article I wrote for the September, 1995 *Atlantic Monthly* (reprinted in the *Fall, 1995 Human Life Review*). It demands that the pro-choice side of the abortion debate face up to the reality of what abortion is, use honest language instead of verbal evasions, and take seriously their stated goal of making abortion "rare." I had tried to say those things politely, but Wolf lets it all hang out.

What I had called pro-choice "euphemisms" (terms like "pregnancy termination" and "reproductive health procedure") she calls "delusions," "fibs," and "lies." Where I had talked about the disturbing physical "reality" of abortion, she talks about its "brutality." I had tried, with as much tact as I could muster, to suggest that abortion advocates were not paying enough attention to the life of the fetus; Wolf accuses them of a "hardness of heart" so extreme as to risk turning them into "casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of human life." To top it off, her article has an ultrasound photo of a fetus, one of those "graphic" representations usually ruled out of order in mainstream abortion discussions.

After seeing all this, my first thought was: What kind of reception was it going to get? My own article had elicited some 250 letters to *Atlantic Monthly*, many of them thunderously wrathful; some written entirely in capital letters. Not unreasonably, then, I thought Wolf would get a lot of people sore. Evidently not so, however: to date, the *New Republic* has published five letters on her article, two of them supportive, one mixed, one critical but civil, and a single nasty one (from Jane Johnson, "interim co-president" of Planned Parenthood). The editors probably got many times that number of letters, so we can't be sure that the ratio held. But probably it is about right.

The *New Republic* has an electronic bulletin board on America Online, as does *Atlantic Monthly*. They serve as Distant Early Warning Systems, permitting not only immediate but unselected public reaction to published articles. Within hours after mine came out, the Online bulletin board started

---

George McKenna is a professor of political science at the City College of New York; his latest book is *The Drama of Democracy* (Dushkin Publishers, 1994).

heating up. Curious to see whether Wolf's article would get a similar reaction I checked the *New Republic's* postings and found exactly two, both of them half-hearted, wimpy criticisms, and then a reply to one of them. The numbers have not changed since (except for another posting from one of the wimps).

Why? The only explanation I can think of is that the second part of Wolf's article must have reassured abortion supporters that she's helping their cause. (One pro-choice correspondent claimed to have shed tears of joy after reading the piece.) That may be what she intended, but at a deeper level her critic from Planned Parenthood had it exactly right: "Thanks, but we'd rather grapple with enemies we know than so-called friends in Wolf's clothing."

What Wolf has done in her article is to surrender strategic territory: the logically essential, if scientifically dubious, assumption that the human fetus is not a human being. In its original form, this assumption was usually stated (when it was stated at all) as a scornful dismissal of the fetus as a "blob of tissue." The updated, sophisticated version allows that some fetuses may look human (especially when their legs and buttocks are dangling out of the vagina), but insists that they aren't really human because they don't have much going on in their heads.

One of my critics wrote that a fetus is not a human person because it doesn't have "ideas, passions, hopes, memories, expectations, intentions." This of course would expel from the human race a large number of *already-born* people now residing in nursing homes, asylums, and homeless shelters.

Wolf is having none of it. With apparent approval she quotes Norma McCorvey's characterization of a second-trimester fetus as "a baby," and one of her most trenchant observations is that many of the same Yuppie parents-to-be who buy those nice holistic birthing books, with pretty color pictures of unborn babies, are ready to consign the unwanted unborn to the trash bag. She writes:

So, what will it be: Wanted fetuses are charming, complex, REM-dreaming little beings whose profile on the sonogram looks just like Daddy, but unwanted ones are mere "uterine material"?

All right, then, unborn babies are babies. But now Wolf goes on to insist that "sometimes the mother must be able to decide that the fetus, *in its full humanity*, must die" [emphasis mine]. Putting it more bluntly—Wolf, after all, wants straight talk—her proposition is that sometimes a mother must be able to kill her baby. When? She does not directly answer that question, but her view is not hard to detect. She notes that when the pollsters ask Americans whether they think abortion should be "a matter

between a woman, her doctor, her family, her conscience and her God," support for abortion shoots up to 72 percent. She recalls her own success in silencing a prolife critic by admitting that "of course" she had a baby inside her but that if she felt the need to kill it, "that would be between myself and God."

This suggests a triangular relationship: the woman, her baby, and God. But that is not what she means. In acknowledgment of the fact that many of her pro-choice readers do not believe in God, Wolf adds that "if you are secular and prefer it" you can just say "conscience." "God" is a kind of tempo-setter here, a pious word meant to convey a sense of solemnity. The decision actually involves only the woman, the baby, and herself. And, since the baby has no voice in the decision, it comes down to the woman and herself. So if the question were asked *when* a mother "must be able to decide" whether or not to have her baby killed, her answer would have to be: whenever she feels like it.

To be sure, Wolf believes that there are good and bad ("better and worse") reasons for disposing of unwanted babies. She scolds girls who get abortions just to see if their boyfriends love them enough to accompany them to the clinic, and she is scornful of society ladies who got pregnant because the Chardonnay was so good. But nowhere does she suggest that there should be any legal restrictions on abortion, or even questions asked of anyone getting one. Wolf makes fun of pro-choicers who talk about abortion as "an intensely personal decision" ("one's choice of *carpeting* is an intensely personal decision") but it is hard to see how her conclusion is any different.

Yet it doesn't fit her premises. She wants an end to euphemisms, fibs, and evasions. She insists that we face up to the fact that each abortion kills a human being, and that a large proportion of the 1.5 million killed every year are done in for the most frivolous of reasons. Therefore . . . abortion on demand? It doesn't make sense. Let us, however, acknowledge that she tries to *make* it make sense. The way she does that is to talk about sin and redemption.

There is quite a bit of religious stuff in this essay. As we have seen, God, or at any rate "God," gets brought into it. So also "soul," which she says the pro-choicers are in danger of losing. (Again, figuratively. She means that they could lose the moral high ground in the abortion debate.) And, in the concluding part of her essay, she signals that it is high time to revive the concept of sin.

But "sin" for her turns out to be another metaphor. It means "sense of sin," or guilt-feelings. Abortion, she says, has to be placed into "a matrix

of individual conscience, atonement, and responsibility.” Why? Two reasons. First, because guilt leads to atonement, and atonement “brings on God’s compassion and our redemption.” Feel bad and you will soon feel good. The first payoff, then, is therapeutic. The second is political. By talking about sin and redemption, pro-choicers can beat their opponents at their own game—out-pietizing them, as it were—and thus win “the support of the center.”

This last consideration sounds a little worldly and Machiavellian, but she quickly returns to the “redemption” business. It appears that it has to be earned. For this she suggests a variety of penances, from contributing to mothers’ aid funds to providing girls with contraceptives. Candle-lighting is another option. She quotes Laurence Tribe’s observation that in Japan women conduct memorial services for the souls of their aborted fetuses, and ends by asking us to imagine a New World where abortion is rare because contraceptives are widely available. (Are contraceptives that scarce?)

In such a world, “passionate feminists might well hold candlelight vigils at abortion clinics, standing shoulder to shoulder with the doctors who work there, commemorating and saying goodbye to the dead.” To best appreciate these sentiments, remember that Wolf’s moral analysis is meant to apply to the fetus “in its full humanity.” Imagine, now, a mother saying: “I feel the need to kill my baby, so I will. But afterwards I will mourn its death, do some community service, and light a candle to say goodbye.” Wolf thus ends on a Swiftian note, but does she mean it to be satirical? I don’t think so. I don’t think she means anything by it. It is nonsense, sickly-sweet nonsense.

**H**ow could an essay begun with honesty and clarity of thought fall into such a mess? My guess is that at some point Wolf realized that the premises she develops in the first part of her essay cannot possibly sustain the affirmation of an unlimited “right to choose.” So she tried to bind the two together with consoling talk about sin and redemption—an empty, silly gesture that is best forgotten.

What is memorable in Naomi Wolf’s essay is its willingness to discuss the fetus “in its full humanity” and its insistence that there are bad reasons for getting abortions. (That is what bothers her Planned Parenthood critic, for whom “every woman’s decision about abortion is a moral decision.”)

Where the debate goes from here is anyone’s guess, but it seems clear to me that she has gone far to undermine the foundations of abortion on demand. It is not inconceivable that one day she may herself realize this, change sides, and bring some of her followers with her.



## With Friends Like Her

William McGurn

Give Naomi Wolf her due. In an age when the favored approach to a defense of abortion rights is a Murphy Brownish one-liner that has Dan Quayle as its punch line, Miss Wolf has presented an argument. It is, to be sure, not without the usual pieties about the place of such rights in the pantheon of high civilization. But what makes her effort remarkable is its candor and lack of evasion. In attempting to put abortion rights on firmer ground (tactically as well as morally), Miss Wolf attacks what she characterizes as “the series of self-delusions, fibs and evasions” that lie at the heart of that movement. That may not gain her many friends among her opponents, but it will certainly earn her enemies among her friends.

The gist of Miss Wolf’s argument is straightforward enough: that the amoral worldview of the pro-choice movement will end up costing them “the millions of Americans who want to support abortion as a legal right but still need to condemn it as a moral iniquity.” In the few thousand words allotted to her, she tries to reverse this process by providing that moral context and demonstrating how it might be put forth to a nation that has still not made up its mind on the issue. Yet this is no simple treatise on tactics. To the contrary, though she would probably not take my word for it (I do not, after all, share her desire to see abortion rights more securely enshrined), my guess is that her advice would imply consequences more congenial to people like me than to people like her. Where Miss Wolf does have something to say, however, is in the area of morality.

And say it she does, fully conscious of all the contradictions at the heart of so private, and so awful, a decision. Advocates of abortion, she says, are today in danger of losing their “souls” (her word). She means that, moreover, in the full sense of the word: not because of their sins *per se* but because of a worldview that denies sin itself and, by extension, atonement. She begins by exploding the comfortable evasions (Orwell’s “smelly little orthodoxies”) that allow those who support abortion to avoid ever having really to think about it. “There is a sense among us, let us be frank, that the gruesomeness of the imagery *belongs* to the proliferers,” she writes, “that it emerges from the dark, frightening minds of fanatics.” Yet Miss Wolf goes on to make the obvious point that, for all the gore and sensationalism of certain pro-life literature, at its essence it is still simple biological fact.

---

William McGurn is senior editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in Hong Kong.

“To insist that the truth is in poor taste,” she dryly observes, “is the very height of hypocrisy.”

The result is that though proliferators come in for their share of criticism, Miss Wolf’s most withering scorn is reserved for folks such as Joycelyn Elders, whose flip remark about America’s getting over “its love affair with the fetus” she finds repellent (imagine, she asks, what the response would be to a movement “that spoke of our ‘getting over our love affair’ with the terminally ill”?). And unlike the thought police of the left, Miss Wolf does not object to them because she believes them to be in bad taste. She objects to them because of the idea that underscores their statements, a culture in which babies seem to “have less value in themselves” and are instead increasingly “accoutrements to enhance parental quality of life.” Musing on the inconsistencies of an America where the fetus is at once dismissed as a blob of protoplasm while at the same time a whole industry has sprung up to record the growing wonder of yuppie pregnancy, she asks a question:

If we avidly cultivate love for the ones we bring to term, and “get over” our love for the ones we don’t, do we not risk developing a hydroponic view of babies—and turn them into a product we can cull for our convenience?

I don’t think that I am reading into this to see the same argument that lies at the heart of Pope John Paul’s *Evangelium Vitae*: a culture of death, where the “criterion of personal dignity—which demands respect, generosity and service—is replaced by the criterion of efficiency, functionality and usefulness: others are considered not for what they ‘are’ but for what they ‘have, do and produce’ . . . the supremacy of the strong over the weak.”

No small part of the problem, in Miss Wolf’s mind, is that the abortion-rights movement is “religiously illiterate,” not simply unbelievers but people who find the language of Main Street America alien and forbidding. She finds God’s absence from pro-choice discourse particularly compelling, and suggests that were He restored to his rightful place the abortion-rights movement would have a much better time of it. And here is where she begins to go astray.

On paper, the idea of repositioning abortion rights in a moral context has tremendous appeal. But I’m not sure it would work, at least not the way she thinks it would. For once a moral pro-choice language moves outside the realm of pure abstraction, it either loses all meaning or would soon find itself translated into specific actions that would probably see abortion rights circumscribed (though not eliminated altogether). And I don’t mean solely by politics.

President Clinton offers a good example of the former. In his words the President sounds nothing like Joycelyn Elders or Kate Michelman. But in his actions, he reflects the radicalism of the Democratic Party platform: not only abortion on demand, but subsidized abortion on demand, so that no abortion anywhere might ever go undone. The easy answer is that the President is simply a hypocrite, willing to say one thing but do another.

My suspicion is that there is something more to it than that, an acknowledgement that the abortion-rights umbrella must be comprehensive or fall back on itself.

Several years ago this was illustrated to me most dramatically during an impromptu House debate over an appropriations bill for the Department of Labor and Health and Human Services. A Bush veto had taken out controversial language about using Medicaid to fund abortion in cases of rape and incest, and Democrats led by Oregon's Les AuCoin started decrying the Republicans for their hard-heartedness and lack of feeling. Republican Bob Walker hadn't prepared anything, but when AuCoin began his tirade Walker put it to him directly: Are you for or against abortion on demand? AuCoin spoke feebly of choice, and Walker pressed his advantage: name one abortion you would oppose. AuCoin retreated, and time ran out. He couldn't name one. Nor can Bill Clinton.

The more persuasive side to Miss Wolf's case is her contention that such a position would appeal to the mushy middle: the roughly three-quarters of Americans who both believe abortion is a form of murder and yet believe it should remain legal. This is the audience which Miss Wolf believes the pro-choice movement is missing, and she believes that by presenting abortion as a necessary evil rather than some sort of sacrament, the movement stands a better chance of garnering their support.

But Miss Wolf's tactical error—one not made by the pro-choice movement, I should note—is to assume that the mushy middle would remain the mushy middle in a real debate. True, Americans do not want abortion banned outright, and I doubt they ever will. That said, once the issue moves from *abortion* to *abortions*, it becomes clear that most Americans are opposed to most abortions: what Miss Wolf herself calls abortions further along the culpability spectrum (abortion because the child is not the desired sex, because the mother is a minor, because the father is unwilling to help raise the child, etc.). Were Americans to begin to look more closely into the actual circumstances of most abortions, it is unlikely that the result would be a boost for the pro-abortion side.

Right now, the pro-choice cause is helped by the public's desire not to

know more than it *has* to, which is only human, because it would mean thinking hard about unpleasant things. The result has been a typically American solution: to dump the problems on the federal courts and politicians. Although this was begun by the pro-choice side in *Roe v. Wade*, by which the laws of 48 states were torn asunder in the name of a hitherto hidden right, it has also been embraced by the pro-life movement in its bid for the chimera of a constitutional amendment that is not likely to come (if it did, it would have about the same effect as Prohibition). It has also put a burden of moral clarity on Republican political leaders that is not demanded even of priests these days.

Were abortion to be treated honestly and openly, the outcome would undoubtedly be an increasing number of restrictions, probably varying dramatically state by state. And here I would like to know a bit more about where Miss Wolf means to lead us: whether she believes we should keep abortion unrestricted but mourn it more (impractical), or whether she means to argue that in the interests of keeping abortion secure as a right, certain restrictions might be admitted. Either way, it cannot be a comfortable position. As she points out in her own piece, the libertarian argument for complete non-interference leads precisely to the culture she finds so abhorrent. But the acceptance of restrictions outside a woman's own choices seems to run counter to the value she puts on feminist autonomy.

**T**he pro-choice movement understands this all too well, which is why they maintain their absolutist line. For the abortion enterprise in America is not about abortion *per se* but about the culture of death that the Pope and Naomi Wolf both find so troubling, the kind of society that values human beings not primarily in and of themselves, but only in the utility they have for others, even their parents. Thus the framed sonogram pictures ("Mozart for your belly" says Miss Wolf) and abortion on demand are flip sides of the same coin, a view not just of life inside the womb but of life itself. Abortion is the lodestar of this worldview, because if there can be abortion without guilt—better yet without sin—there can be anything.

In taking this worldview head on, Miss Wolf has shown uncommon honesty and strength of mind, and my guess is that if she follows it through it will ultimately take her places she does not yet intend to go. Indeed, if the culture she decries is as strong as I think it is, it will send her to places she does not want to be. The movement for abortion rights, after all, is well equipped to resist the attacks of its enemies. What is not yet clear is whether it can afford an honest defense from a self-defined friend.

## A Wolf in Wolf's Clothing

Lynette Burrows

Abraham Lincoln once remarked that if a person did not consider slavery wrong, it was difficult to see how they could consider anything else wrong either. One can see now exactly what he meant. It just isn't possible to sing songs about "all God's chillen" having this and that in common, if you can buy and sell a substantial number of them like sheep. All societies have, to some extent, an interlinked morality that can be likened to a fragile eco-system. Any part of it which is allowed to degenerate risks destroying the balance of the whole.

The moral structure of what used to be called Christendom, and is now called liberal democracy, rests upon the cornerstone of the sanctity of innocent human life and the duty of the strong to defend the weak. The question is, for how long is it possible to uphold such a belief in the face of a culture that accepts abortion as a normal, everyday event? If there is, in fact, no duty upon the citizen to uphold the rights of those who have done no wrong and whose position is uniquely vulnerable, how is it possible to sustain convincing reasons why more troublesome elements in society should receive any better treatment?

The feminist writer Naomi Wolf caused a stir in the pages of *The New Republic* in October, with a long article entitled "Our Bodies, Our Souls" in which she argued that feminists must face the fact that abortion involves the taking of life, or risk becoming cut off from the moral mainstream which has realized where an abortion mentality is leading them. She took many pages to make this point, the first part of which at least would be regarded as a blinding glimpse of the obvious to many. However, it demonstrated—at least to this reader—that in this matter, the Americans think differently from us in Britain.

In America a real battle is currently underway on the issue of abortion, and every politician has to make his position clear, one way or another. This is not so in Britain or, as far as I know, in other European countries either. This could be construed as indicating that the Americans, in this period, have a more quick and palpable moral sense than us. However, Ms. Wolf's article made me realize, with a sense of shock, that the real reason for the difference is that those Americans who are pro-abortion really believe that abortion is a good thing.

---

Lynette Burrows, a well-known English journalist and broadcaster, is the mother of six.

Wolf quotes a forthcoming book by a fearsome women called Laura Kaplan, which charts the history of the “underground abortion service” whose members learnt to carry out abortions *so that they did not have to rely on male doctors to do it*; and who referred to the unborn child who was the object of their attentions as “material” well into its fourth month.

She describes a typical abortion carried out by these women, where the room “explodes with excitement” as the staffer withdraws the speculum and declares the life terminated. The “understandable exhilaration” they feel, she explains, is because of the women who die of illegal abortions. This is so facile an explanation that it makes the heart quail at the similarity with human sacrifices made to atone for ills committed elsewhere. Despite the best efforts of those in favour of abortion in Britain, almost nobody would use words like these to describe the termination of a life. Nobody would even argue that abortion is a *good* thing.

Perhaps our history explains this difference. In Europe, we are long accustomed to attacking one another. There have been many times when we have happily laid waste our neighbours’ lands and killed their men, women and children before running off with all the spoils we could load onto a wagon. We didn’t think the killing was right; we just felt, as the feminists would say, that it was right for us at that time.

Nobody, but nobody, ever sat down and tried to justify such random, or even mass, killings as regularly took place. They were simply the side effect of a greater struggle, usually for something noble like glory, justice, revenge or—even—land! After it was all over, we respected one another’s war graves and stood in silence as they mourned their losses, if we happened to be a tourist in their country on the appropriate day for such things. We didn’t try and pretend that the dead weren’t dead, or that they had never really been people because, at the time, they were our enemy. We just shrugged our shoulders sadly and murmured things about the horrors of war, etc. But they were always horrors.

To take these things out of distant history, there is no doubt that the Germans did not think it right to kill men, women and children in their concentration camps. That is why the German public were never officially told about the “Final Solution” even though they certainly knew that it was going on. They thought it justified by necessity; the necessity to advance towards other collective goals without being encumbered by the Jews, the handicapped, gypsies, homosexuals, or dissenters.

In England, this has been, roughly, the position with regard to abortion and is the reason, no doubt, why it has never been shown on T.V. It is certainly not because it is gory and might affect the squeamish. We have

plumbed the depths of gore in medical programmes and have come up smiling. It is because everyone knows that it is a moral evil—but, as on countless other occasions, it is something that we want to do at this time, or to see done in our name. That being the case, we just get on with it and let those who really care try to rescue whom they can. For the rest, we probably feel that, at worst, it is a case of “the weak going to the wall.” We have always been remarkably cool about killing one another in cold blood, as only a continent that has bombed flat, and had bombed, large areas of cities, can be.

The American experience is different. Naomi Wolf explains the process by which she became aware—after years of happy ignorance—that there was a moral dimension to abortion. She became pregnant and was thus able to describe, with a charming sensitivity to the feelings of fellow feminists, that *for her* a four month old foetus is a baby. This she discovered not through an examination of empirical fact, or logical deduction from observation—or even from a reasonable apprehension of science—but simply because she was pregnant herself. This must be regarded as a process analogous to discovering the reality of gravity only after a slab of concrete has fallen on one from a great height.

However, she gravely remarks, before announcing her devastating discovery: “When in doubt, listen to women.” Well, with all due respect, Ms. Wolf, if it takes you that long to discover one of biology’s best-known secrets, we had better not slow our progress by awaiting your answers on any of life’s more complicated problems.

From this central discovery, Ms. Wolf finds a few more things that she somehow missed before cluttering up the landscape like giant boulders. “The pro-life warning about the potential of widespread abortion to degrade reverence for life does have a nugget of truth,” she tells us. And, “To deny the reality of a human life in the womb” involves the risk of “hardness of heart, callousness, and a casually destructive view of human life.” Too true, Ms. Wolf, but then we never did believe that Betty Friedan, *et al.*, got faces like that from *loving* people.

Most astonishing from a British point of view, perhaps, is the discovery that in America, if Wolf is to be believed, girls—particularly middle-class ones—regard having an abortion as an indispensable part of their emotional *curriculum vitae* and as the equivalent of the 1950’s fraternity pin. So much for educating girls, then, is all one could say if after forty years of it they have lost the ability to distinguish between a minor ornament and a major moral problem.

However, I am inclined to believe that, as in my country, the people beloved and promoted by the media are a small number who conform to the media's own agenda and beliefs, and that most of the rest of us carry a rabbit's foot in our pocket when we dine with them. Hence, we have another exemplar of this genuine sub-culture in the form of the "Interim co-president of Planned Parenthood," Jane Johnson, who reproached Ms. Wolf for her views in a subsequent letter to *The New Republic*, and who boldly asserted that "Every woman's decision about abortion is a moral decision."

Now this is a truly remarkable thing to say and it would be interesting to know whether she extends this right of women to invent their own morality to, say, other forms of killing, or burglary; or—come on, let's be generous—to any damn thing they like.

Strangely enough—and I say this not merely to be insulting—it is a position which reminds one inescapably of the Nazis, blithely inventing claims to "laying the foundations of a Reich that would last a thousand years." It didn't, of course, and, as with all such large claims made by moral pygmies, their plans turned out differently. However, what the Nazis were unable to impose by force, they were responsible for introducing into our culture by other means.

It is a melancholy fact that, after the First World War, many sensitive and intelligent people became fixated by a sense of loss at the numbers killed. Anyone who has visited the chapel at Trinity College, Cambridge will perhaps get an idea of how this could come about. The wall of the ante-chapel is covered with the names of those who died in the Second World War and there is a sense of shock, when one sees it, that in just one college of only a few hundred students, death could have undone so many. But then, passing through into the main chapel, one finds *three* walls covered with the far more numerous dead of the First World War and one realizes, indeed, the full force of the terrible statistic that the average life of an officer in that war was three weeks.

Thus, the idea of selective breeding became fashionable in many of the countries which had lost a disproportionate number of their brightest and best in the Great War and led, inexorably over time, to the development of programmes of the kind the Nazis not only approved, but which they actively encouraged. Hence the grotesque contrast between our assiduous concern for comfortably-off couples who seek "in vitro" babies in an ever growing number of clinics, and our complete lack of concern for the fate of ethnically-unwanted babies or the children of the poor. This is the reality of what is happening now, and the feminists and their trumpeting



are merely a side-show that has facilitated what the Nazis and the Chinese were, and are, perfectly capable of achieving without their help.

Still, we should be grateful for small mercies, and the fact that Naomi Wolf at least has realized that there is something to mourn and regret in every avoidable death, is something. The next step which can perhaps be predicted sometime in the next thirty years, if their learning curve continues at its present rate, is that individuals take steps to avoid unwanted results—particularly when they have realized that they are also inherently bad.

They will realize that the best way to deter what individuals have discovered is bad for them, although tempting, is by means of a thing called the law which, actually, few people break, simply because it is there. For example, people make all sorts of changes to their life style because of the necessity of earning a living rather than stealing, quarrelling without fighting and even drinking without driving. If Ms. Wolf is serious about abortion being bad for mothers, and slightly more crucially bad for infants, why should she object to it being made more difficult?

There are several areas of human life, such as care of the terminally ill and of the sick, where even the Catholic Church contents itself with the advice that one should strive to save, but not strive officiously, and this allows for the flexibility which even a Mother Teresa might need, in perfect good faith. Most civilized countries have resisted the temptation simply to legalize the quick disposal of such problem cases, knowing that the temptation of an easy solution is one which most people, in their better moments, do not want offered to them.

The compromise solution, which acknowledges the gravity of decisions affecting life and death, is that though it is a crime to cause the death of another, there are cases in which circumstances provide a defence to the charge of, guess what: “callousness, hard-heartedness and a casually destructive view of human life.”

Far from devaluing women—or making them “once more the victims of male-dominated institutions” or whatever the current cant is—this would indicate a degree of importance attached by society to the one role which belongs to women alone and which feminists so hate: that of being “vessels” which harbour the next generation. The fact is that everything that really matters to us is protected by law and, if it isn’t, it is because nobody gives a damn.

It is not beyond the bounds of possibility, either, that women themselves—or at least that irresponsible section that Ms. Wolf describes—

LYNETTE BURROWS

would discover they could live without taking the risk of becoming pregnant when they are not in a position to support a child. It just might encourage them to bring some of the moral fervour which they have deployed in support of the indefensible to bear on those sections of society which have made a fat living out of persuading them to see themselves as little more than whores or mindless, irresponsible bimbos.

What is very surprising to those who do not share the feminists' point of view about history or women's place in it, is that brave and energetic women like Naomi Wolf do not see themselves as part of a sisterhood stretching back in time. They are not unique to the 20th century and, as with women in the past, they mostly get what they want, given the limitations, not of their sex, but of their status in society. A factory owner's wife, for instance, always had more power than the postman or clerk who served her.

Women's influence over their children and their men has always ensured that, within the social constraints which they have both helped to make and upheld, they have played as important a part as men in forming those areas of society in which they have an active interest.

Therefore, what they are contemplating now is not the result of millennia of the suppression of women. That in itself would prove, as nothing else could, that men and women are truly not equal. What they are looking at, and not liking, is a world that they have helped to create and if they don't much like it, then they must work—as they always have done—to change it again, but by the means now at their disposal.

One thing is certain, however; women must always look to the defence of their children because if they don't, all history tells us that no one else can. Maybe what the next "phase" of feminism will produce is the realization that the most important liberation they can have now is from ideas that misled them into ever thinking otherwise.



*'No! I'm on a low-bat diet.'*

THE SPECTATOR 4 November 1995

## You Can't Get There from Here

Rebecca Ryskind Teti

Kudos to Naomi Wolf for having the courage to admit what her eyes and senses have made plain: that the fetus is a baby. But her effort to rescue the abortion movement from what she calls “hardness of heart” is a logical failure. The movement which looks at a sonogram and sees “tissue” or “material” to be disposed of casually may be lying to itself, but at least it is still unwilling to take innocent life. If that same movement looks at a sonogram and sees a baby—and disposes of it anyway—it may be more honest, but its heart is of stone.

No doubt unintentionally, Ms. Wolf’s proposal asks the women’s movement to adopt a posture of cold nihilism: yes, it’s a baby; dispose of it anyway; that’s how it goes. It is hard to conceive of a more hard-hearted position than that.

Ms. Wolf’s continuing support for abortion—given her new attitude about what a fetus is—is more than hard-hearted. It undermines the possibility of the kind of society feminists long for: one in which “gender is no barrier.” Sorry, but you can’t get there from here. The equality of women depends upon men’s continuing commitment to the idea that all human beings are created equal—on their willingness to respect the natural rights of persons who are, at least physiologically, weaker than they are.

Like all political ideas, the idea that all men are created equal retains its force only while it engages the hearts and minds of a polity’s citizens. How are new generations supposed to become attached to the idea of equality, when with each passing moment the so-called right to abortion substitutes the principle that might makes right for the equality of all human beings which Lincoln called “our ancient faith?”

The founding document of this nation, and the fundamental law of the land holds the following:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, *deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed* [my emphasis].

I have quoted from the Declaration of Independence to show that the right

---

Rebecca Ryskind Teti directs the Wakefield Women’s Institute in Washington, D.C., which, she says, is “dedicated to the authentic liberation of women.”

to abortion, if there be such a thing, turns on the question of the humanity of the unborn child. If it is *not* a human being, then it must be property, and a woman may do with it whatever she will, as a matter of self-government. If it *is* a human being—and Ms. Wolf insists it is time for the feminist movement to recognize that it is—then abortion means the destruction of self-government, because it enshrines in law the principle that some human beings have the right to deny the natural right to life of other human beings.

This is not a matter of mere personal choice, between an individual woman and her God; this is the overthrow of the very principles of freedom and equal rights, and with them the American regime. To paraphrase what Lincoln said about slavery, when a woman governs herself, that is self-government. When she governs herself and another—without the other's consent, and with totally different rules from those by which she governs herself—that is oppression.

Ms. Wolf calls abortion an “evil,” and suggests that a woman who undergoes one should make an effort to atone. “Atonement,” in every moral system, means regret for wrongdoing. By saying that abortion is a wrong—but women have a right to choose it anyway—Ms. Wolf is contending that there is a right to do wrong. This is a plain self-contradiction, for if there is a right to do wrong then, by her own logic, society has the right to deny women abortions, even though Ms. Wolf thinks that would be wrong. The “right to do wrong” is simply another expression for “might makes right.” If Ms. Wolf is a hard-hearted nihilist, perhaps that is what she wants. But she should see that “might makes right” is a game women can never win.

**M**uch as feminists may wish to isolate “might makes right” to women making decisions about unborn babies, others, seeing a good thing, have taken the abortion rule to heart. The new principle has corrupted every dimension of our relationships with each other, making freedom next to impossible. Ms. Wolf herself recognizes this problem; she sees that abortion has degraded the value of human life. She blames abortion for “the eerie situation that we are now facing, wherein the culture seems increasingly to see babies not as creatures to whom parents devote their lives, but as accoutrements to enhance parental quality of life.” And she goes on to fret about the frequent stories of “‘worthless’ babies left naked on gratings or casually dropped out of windows, while ‘valuable,’ genetically correct babies are created at vast expense and with intricate medical assistance.”

To her examples of our diminishing regard for the rights of others, one could add more: the same civil disobedience which was so central to the

civil rights movement (when blacks were not considered equal to whites) is today denied to “pro-life” demonstrators only—thanks to the near-hysterical need to defend abortion at all costs—through the FACE (Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances) bill and other unjust legislation, under which women, children, elderly people and clergy are called terrorists, jailed, and treated as criminals for peacefully protesting abortion.

Medical science is not without its taint: the growing push for euthanasia offers the convenience of getting rid of burdensome elderly or sick parents; the relation between abortion and breast cancer cannot be openly explored or even discussed, and the federal government funds experiments on the tissue of unborn babies which everyone knows have little hope of success, except at pitting the elderly against the young. No medical “leader” so much as blinked when our last Surgeon General testified before the U.S. Senate that abortion has had a positive effect on American public health because it has nearly eliminated Down’s Syndrome. If it is a great benefit to raise average intelligence by eliminating people whose I.Q.s are under seventy, wouldn’t it be an even greater benefit to eliminate those with I.Q.s under eighty? Or ninety? What’s *your* I.Q.?

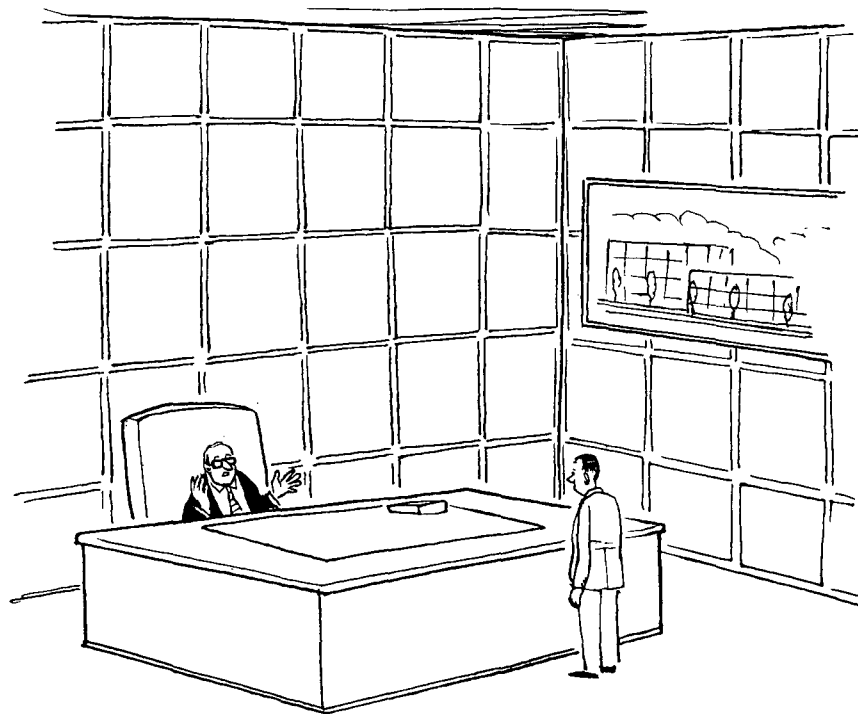
Every day all over America, and especially in the nation’s capital where I live, people are killed as a mere convenience or whim. For earrings, or sneakers, or because they didn’t change lanes quickly enough. Or for no reason at all. The rate of violence against women and children is at an all-time high. Are women free if they cannot take a walk in their own neighborhoods without fearing attack?

Even some who say they are anti-abortion have taken life into their own hands through violent acts or threats. Might makes right: all are corrupted. Societies have a way of rushing new ideas to unforeseen, but logical and inexorable, conclusions.

No human freedom—women’s or men’s—can be founded on the right to deny the freedoms of others. No class of human beings can be exempt from the principle that all human beings are created equal without calling the rights of all others into question. There is no principle—color, intellect, power, age, beauty, or sex—which, established to legitimize the oppression of one sort of person, could not be used to oppress others by anyone lighter, brighter, stronger, older, prettier, or of the *other* sex. That women—whose physiological weaknesses were so long used against them as justification for male dominance—can now turn on those even weaker than they are is astonishing. In doing so, they undermine the basis for their own newly-won freedoms.

REBECCA RYSKIND TETI

In 1859, Abraham Lincoln wrote in a letter that “he who would *be* no slave must consent to *have* no slave. Those who deny to others deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God can not long retain it.” Later, he wrote “as I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. That is my definition of democracy.” The rights of the unborn are intimately conjoined to our own, which is why I pray that Naomi Wolf’s honesty, having brought her so far, will soon bring her to see the logic of her own refreshing discovery.



Nick Downes

*'Do you think I like being treated as a number either, even though that number is "one"?'*

THE SPECTATOR 4 November 1995

84/WINTER 1996

## God Can Forgive Anything

*Ellen Wilson Fielding*

Naomi Wolf's *New Republic* article of last October immediately captured the attention of columnists and commentators. This feminist and advocate of abortion rights admitted that "the death of a fetus is a real death," thereby shaking up political allies and raising muted cheers from her long-time opponents. "Muted" because Ms. Wolf does not follow us all the way into the country of genuine culpability and real consequences.

With unmistakable emotion, Ms. Wolf writes that "we [pro-abortionists] stand in jeopardy of losing what can only be called our souls. . . . And we risk becoming precisely what our critics charge us with being: callous, selfish and casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of human life." To counteract this she imagines "an abortion-rights movement willing publicly to mourn the evil," but adds the fatal clause "necessary evil though it may be." The disjunction between this modest solution and the often painfully honest description of what abortion really means and how trivially it is often chosen leave the pro-life reader wondering what happened to a crucial part of the argument.

Why "necessary"? Why must the laws of the land be stretched to accommodate the most laughably inadequate motives, such as those she portrays behind her own decision to use a morning-after pill several years ago? With almost masochistic honesty she confesses: "there were two columns in my mind—'Me' and 'Baby'—and the first won out. . . . I was not so unlike those young louts who father children and run from the specter of responsibility, except that my refusal to be involved with this potential creature was as definitive as a refusal can be."

Ms. Wolf appears here to have laid the framework for a truly bold leap into traditional morality. But in a pattern repeated throughout the article, she then immediately draws back from the implications of her thoughts. She tosses out a line that John Paul II could really sink his philosophical teeth into—"freedom means that women must be free to choose self or to choose selfishly"—and scuttles away before we can press her further.

How would this precariously-based right to abort differ from a right to steal or murder or cheat on taxes or abandon a (born) child? Why, when she will admit that abortion is a very serious moral act that kills a human

---

Ellen Wilson Fielding, our sometime contributing editor and author of *An Even Dozen*, writes from Davidsonville, Maryland, where she lives with her husband and four children.

being, does Ms. Wolf still attempt to place it in the easy category of private, personal acts? Pro-abortionists raise the rallying cry of “stay out of our bedrooms,” but why aren’t they similarly outraged when the government trespasses into the bedroom to prosecute rape or murder or spousal abuse? Most pro-abortionists fall back on the assertion that the fetus is not a human being but only a “glob of tissue.” Naomi Wolf has not left open this line of retreat.

Instead she retreats to familiar arguments about hard choices, lives worth living, and of all things, the “powerful argument that a woman’s equality in society must give her some irreducible rights unique to her biology, including the right to take the life within her life.” Her decision to terminate a possible pregnancy for what she herself describes as morally inadequate reasons must be protected to create a kind of protective sandbar for the rights of “a woman with fewer economic and social choices than I had—for instance, a woman struggling to finish her higher education, without which she would have little hope of a life worthy of her talents.”

Where is the moral equivalence between taking an innocent life and guaranteeing one’s qualifications for a professional career? No supplementary argument is presented. Wolf expresses some shame about her own decision, but assumes the dilemma of the upwardly-mobile college student will stand on its own. It will not. If she has a right to an abortion, it is because many prior assumptions have been made: that quality of life is crucial to the right to life; that “quality of life” can be adequately measured by yardsticks like material success, career and educational level, and that these measures transcend the richness of things like family life, the experience of several siblings, opportunities to practice sacrificial love and the like.

This will sound smug and hardhearted to most on the pro-choice side of the abortion argument. I wish it didn’t. I wish pro-abortionists could better distinguish between what feels nice and what is right. In the Seventies there was an annoying popular song with a line I winced at every time I heard it: “It can’t be wrong if it feels so right.” Of course it can. It can and often is. Sometimes our emotions push us along the route to truth. The photos of aborted babies *rightly* elicit feelings of shock and revulsion. Yet emotions cannot be left to themselves. Our stomachs would probably revolt almost equally at photos of open-heart surgery. It is the mind which must be set to work explaining and interpreting those feelings, or else feelings and imagination will often pull us away from what we need to do. (“Not another baby! I can’t stand any more interrupted nights, crying, diapers, earaches and runny noses”) instead of drawing us towards our



responsibilities (“A baby!—that soft skin, the downy hair, the coos and gurgles, the soft way they sink into your body as you hold them”).

Ms. Wolf knows many women fairly similar to her in background and ambitions who have suffered emotional pain and guilt in the aftermath of an abortion. We who defend the lives of the unborn know many such cases too—women who lie awake wondering what the baby would look like, what he or she would say; who count anniversaries and avoid the newborn departments in stores. Wolf suggests that such women mourn their aborted fetuses as the Japanese do, with memorial services, and attempt some kind of reparation: “One could then work to provide contraception or jobs, or other choices to young girls; one could give money to programs that provide prenatal care to poor women”—that sort of thing. But such “reparations” are only palliatives, particularly in the spiritually rather stunted forms she suggests. They are primarily intended to relieve the sufferer, rather than to repair the damage, knowing that complete reparation can only come from and through God. The woman who truly feels pain and guilt after an abortion does not just want to feel good about herself again: she wants to feel her baby. That is impossible, in this life, at least, and a healing mourning must recognize just why it is impossible. Something irrevocable has occurred.

There is a great missing link between Ms. Wolf’s admission that post-abortion feelings of guilt are appropriate, and her continued support for abortion on demand. Does she fear the camel’s nose under the tent? Will any restriction ultimately lead to total restriction? I can’t conceal my own preference that this be so, but the rest of the democratic West manages to abort a good many babies with more restrictions than we have.

More than once Wolf speaks of a woman’s need for total autonomy over the fetus in order to counter male power. This is of course a pure power argument, and says nothing about rights or responsibilities. She may as she claims desire only equal power with men, but she means to acquire it at the expense of total power over male and female fetuses, and so there should at least be an attempt to defend such warfare. Where is the equivalent of a just war theory, laying down the conditions of a just abortion?

In some ways the hardline pro-abortionists who refuse even to look at the truth are easier to understand and perhaps easier to sympathize with than Ms. Wolf, who speaks the truth about what she is doing and then considers that she and everyone else may go right on doing it. She uses the Jewish idea of *tikkun*—“mending”—to suggest the kind of atonement proper to those acknowledging that they have sacrificed a life for their

own life-enhancement. I do not know all the details of Jewish atonement, but I would be surprised and dismayed if it didn't have a little more in common with the Christian one than that. A Catholic who confesses his sins, for example, does not receive forgiveness without having a firm intention of avoiding such sin in the future. Only then can you get down to the question of penance.

Ms. Wolf's notion sounds more like a user's tax on sin: pay the penalty in community service, a memorial service, an extra hug or kiss for the lucky fetus that was spared to become your child, and you are free to sin another day.

Now I sound like one of those callous anti-abortionists caricatured by pro-abortionists. Even those of Wolf's modified stripe do not realize the deep empathy most mothers opposed to abortion feel for women whose circumstances make them think it may be the only possible answer. My children made me aware with added keenness that the unborn are human beings, are our children even then. Their dependency upon me then and now highlights my own fearful responsibility. Yet pregnancy and child-birth are not easy, and would not always be natural choices. A price is paid—by feminist standards an extremely heavy and unequal one—in becoming a mother. And most mothers have faced sharp fears about money or health or the threat of desertion during at least one pregnancy or possible pregnancy.

These anxieties and heartaches are real and powerful. It is because they can threaten to overwhelm us that we must confront them with truth—the truth Naomi Wolf lets us glimpse before shielding herself and us from the full consequences.

This truth is that the unborn life within us—within me or Ms. Wolf or any other woman—lays higher claims on us than a college degree, a promotion, an unencumbered romantic relationship, family approval, even the anger and rejection of a spouse who feels ill-used, cheated or overwhelmed. Its right to life ranks above our present happiness or future imagined unhappiness, not least because these are precarious and partially willed states whose conditions we can neither pin down now nor ensure for the future. Were Wolf's friends who suffered guilt over their abortions "happy"? Happier than they would otherwise have been? Who knows? Can we really let that be the question?

Ms. Wolf tells us that being free means the freedom to choose selfishly, but even selfish choices have consequences that need to be faced up to. The selfish choice to engage in unprotected sex outside of marriage or in

desperate financial circumstances may be understandable, but it nevertheless opens the possibility of a consequence that must be accepted—the child. Wolf is subtly cheating her conscience by accepting guilt or shame or regret for aborting a child, rather than accepting the child himself. An honest, complete, conscience-driven sense of guilt would require her to deny that she had the right to end an innocent human life she had helped to create. It would require her to deny others that right too—it would require her to recognize that we do not have the right to abort our unborn.

Like Naomi Wolf, anti-abortionists know well the anguish experienced by women who realize to their great regret what they have done. These women are helped by many of the same things she suggests—memorializing the child, naming the child, confession of guilt, attempts at some kind of atonement through actions taken to help others in similar circumstances.

But the women we meet need more than Naomi Wolf or anyone else on earth can give them. They want to remake the choice, to go back and choose rightly. They want to hold that spared child in their arms and watch him grow to adulthood. They want what they cannot have, now, in this life. They pay a much higher price than Ms. Wolf's words suggest, and this is because they understand the price their babies paid. It is not fair to women to suggest that ritualized remorse will suffice to make them feel all right, or more importantly, to make it *be* all right.

God can forgive any of us anything, once we understand what we have done and reject it. But feelings are not enough. Both we and our country must turn away from the fatally selfish choices we have made. Abraham Lincoln answered Ms. Wolf's article more than a hundred years ago when he said we do not have a right to do wrong.

## Women Who Run with the Wolfs

*Richard Brookhiser*

Naomi Wolf begins “Our Bodies, Our Souls” by invoking Norma McCorvey, the former Jane Roe, now (at least partly) pro-life, whom Wolf calls “an American Everywoman.” Less ambitious, I can only offer the thoughts of one American man.

Wolf urges feminist supporters of abortion to heed their emotions, and those of the McCorveys of this world. When they do, while they will still believe that women should retain the right to have abortions, they will feel sobered by the responsibility. Wolf’s position amounts to saying that it’s all right to have an abortion, so long as you feel bad about it.

When I look for the emotional truth of my feelings about abortion, I come to the opposite conclusion: I don’t like siding with the unborn over any woman. I don’t have to get over my love affair with the fetus because I never had one. But I also know that raw emotional truth can’t be the only guide to my thinking—or to my feeling, for that matter.

The form in which I most often encounter the abortion issue as a political reporter is in the vigils of pro-lifers at campaign events. The last time I saw them out in force was during Colin Powell’s pre-presidential book tour. For six weeks, their raggedy sideshows in front of America’s bookstores constituted the only equivalent of a two-party system so far as the general was concerned. In the end, Powell aborted his candidacy. But the protesters will move on to the next demonstration.

The home-made placards and posters they carried were the usual mix. At the top end were the signs that were sharp and thought-provoking. “Powell,” my favorite asked: “Would You Have Been Pro-Choice on Slavery?” (Another pro-lifer underlined the point visually by dressing as Abraham Lincoln.) Then, there were the signs that were stomach-provoking: all the bloody victims, some of them put to blasphemous uses. My least favorite showed a photograph of a dead fetus superimposed on a cross, with the caption: “Jesus Died for Your Sins, Why Should He?” The iconography of mutilation—the hands, the heads, the forceps-torn body-parts—is intended to hector the viewer into thinking, *These are people*. But the effect they have on this viewer is to make me think, *Not like any people I’ve ever known*.

---

Richard Brookhiser is a senior editor of *National Review*. His latest book, *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* (The Free Press) will be published, fittingly, on Feb. 22.

The little feet do resemble human feet—except that they’re smaller than any feet that I have ever seen, which makes them *different*. The heads have mouths. But since there are no sounds in the womb, the silent scream is silent—which means that it isn’t a scream. In such a way, all the visual features, offered as signs of kinship, just as easily suggest a chasm between born and unborn. And this is before descending to the level of life that is effected by morning-after pills. Placards denouncing these abortions would have to show masses of cells, indistinguishable to a layman from bits of pancreas, or tumors.

On the other side, from my point of view, are the women who have had abortions. They are obviously people; more than that, they are friends. (You only hear about the abortions of friends, unless you read the essays of feminists, which I normally try to avoid doing.) You have heard their mouths talking or laughing; maybe you’ve kissed them, or wanted to. Who else are you supposed to sympathize with? There is something deeply conservative about these sympathies. Edmund Burke’s “little platoon” was small, because it consisted of people you knew: not the mobs of strangers beloved of politicians or saviors, or the abstractions of calculators. You attach primary importance, it goes without saying, to the lives of your fellow platoon members. But you do more: you honor their convenience; you respect (within limits) their whims. The contest between these considerations and the signage at a pro-life rally is pretty lop-sided.

Men, it seems to me, are naturally pro-choice. For women, like Naomi Wolf, the emotional calculus may be complicated by the “baby furies.” As a biological bystander, I have a clear choice between pre-borns I have never met, and women I have.

I have presented my emotional reactions as starkly as I can, because this is also Wolf’s method. If my reactions seem harsh or absurd, that is not because they are unreal, but because they have been elaborated in a vacuum. *Reductio ad absurdum*. The element missing from purely emotional analysis is *thought*. The missing thought in this case is that you don’t kill innocent human beings. At greater length: 1) Fetuses are clearly alive. More, they are headed for independent life. They are *beings*. 2) Considering where and how they originate, they are *human* beings. Scaffolds of argumentation can be assembled around them to assess their degree of personhood, philosophical or legal. (Most fetuses, it seems to me, cannot be legal persons, and many of them are not persons in any sense.) But nothing can make them into dogs or pigs. 3) They haven’t committed any conceivable offense worse than trespassing, which is not a capital crime. 4) And if all

RICHARD BROOKHISER

the preceding are true, then Norma McCorvey is farther along on the way to a proper conclusion than her professed celebrant.

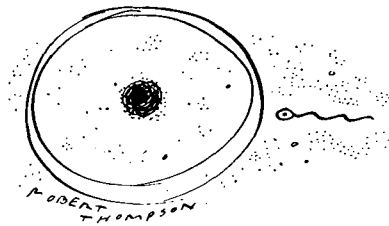
Thoughts, if they are given real attention, do not just lie on the mind's table. They become habits of thought, and emotions form around them, like crystals. These thoughts, not Wolf's meditations, or the Grand Guignol posters of protesters, are what make abortion shocking.

I am not accusing Naomi Wolf of being thoughtless. "Our Bodies, Our Souls" flashes with reason, as well as eloquence. But because she has not thought through the basic issue, she lands in absurdities of her own, the greatest being her call for some Shinto-New Age-Jewish ceremony to make the passing of the little ones bearable. Maybe the Episcopalians can produce something in time for their next Book of Common Prayer. If they can't write it themselves, they can call Michael Lerner.

Absurdity has its uses. The women who take Wolf's advice can salve their anguish with pride. *Only good people*, they will think as they chant and mourn, *can feel as badly as we do*. The emotional sleight of hand recalls George Orwell's crack that Graham Greene, like Charles Baudelaire before him, thought of Hell as an exclusive club, whose membership was open only to Catholics.

But it may be that even candlelight vigils and covert pats on the back cannot make Wolf's position sustainable. The intellectual positions she has accepted, in the course of embracing emotional truth (numbers 1 and 2 above), tend in a certain direction. Even as the South took a harder line on slavery once southerners began to view it as a positive good, Wolf's fraught, and wrought, position foreshadows a softer line on abortion. Twenty years from now, we may understand the abortion controversy to have begun with the attack on Fort Sumter (*Roe v. Wade*) and moved backwards towards the Declaration of Independence.

Honest Abe, the pro-lifer, would be pleased.



'Admit it, you can't live without me.'

THE SPECTATOR 11 February 1995

## APPENDIX A

*[Peggy Noonan, renowned speechwriter for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush (and author of What I Saw at the Revolution), is currently working on a new book about the "Republican revolution" in Washington. This article first appeared on the Op-Ed page of the New York Times (Sunday, Nov. 12, 1995) and is reprinted here with the author's permission.]*

### The Aftergloom of Colin Powell

*Peggy Noonan*

Sometimes an exit is a stage-setter. A character walks on, provides information that advances the story, and leaves stage left or right. The departure creates an empty spot; new players fill it. Colin Powell's graceful exit may be followed by Newt Gingrich's sudden entrance. But General Powell's presence on the stage, and departure, gave Republicans more information than they perhaps expected. And it may upset their fondest story line.

The information has to do with abortion, which is an issue that has been submerged, but submerged like a fault line. The conservative activists who held a news conference a week ago to announce their opposition to the Powell candidacy were motivated by many things. The General's criticism of the Contract With America was a red flag to economic conservatives. So were his comments on affirmative action. But his support of abortion rights—"his Mario Cuomo language," as one activist puts it—sent out the greatest alarm and, I think, most energized the opposition.

Their passion is an indicator of what could become a big fight at the Republican convention in 1996 over whether to retain the party's formal anti-abortion plank.

Now it could be argued that the Democrats too have an abortion problem, for they have won unity on the issue at a terrible cost: the banning of debate as they march in soulless lockstep.

But the Republican problem, if not greater, is more immediate. Which is ironic. There is, after all, much agreement among Republicans on abortion. Most people in the party favor at least some restrictions, such as parental consent for girls under 16 and an end to last-trimester abortions. Almost all Republicans oppose Federal financing. And both sides have eagerly focused on the things they agree on, including changes in the law to make adoption easier.

In some ways the divisions between the two groups are not as stark as have been portrayed. Pro-lifers voted for pro-choice candidates in 1994, such as Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison in Texas, just as pro-choicers voted for pro-lifers. But the party is not likely to choose a President who believes in abortion rights because of the symbolic power of the office.

The big tent had been a pretty peaceful place the past two years, in part because of some big changes.

## APPENDIX A

Spending time in Washington the past nine months, I was repeatedly surprised that most Republicans I spoke to called themselves pro-life. This was not true 10 years ago. I began asking: If you are pro-life, what are you doing to ban abortion? That is when their eyes would dart about, and they would talk about changing the culture. But almost none had ever put forward a bill to ban abortion, and though a number supported a constitutional amendment to do so, no one wanted it brought to the floor, because the votes were not there.

It used to be that you were considered for or against abortion depending on your position on an amendment to ban it. But the Clinton Presidency has changed that. The Democrats' position became: if you're really pro-choice you'll support the Freedom of Choice Act, which effectively keeps the law from banning any abortions under any circumstances. The Democrats haven't brought it up for a vote—because they too lack the votes to pass it. But their broadening of what you must support in order to be called pro-choice let Republicans off a painful hook. The Republican position effectively became: If you oppose the Freedom of Choice Act, you're O.K.—you're pro-life. It eased things. But it didn't solve them.

Most Republican activists will tell you that the party—the people who vote in primaries and support the party locally—is more pro-life than pro-choice, although the numbers are never agreed upon. It is probably true that just more than half the party would vote to ban abortion. But the party also has an influential pro-choice segment, and it gained some ground after 1992. It sees the Republican plank on abortion as an impediment to otherwise certain victory in '96 and wants it gone. In the words of an anti-abortion activist, "They want this to be the party of free markets and free abortions."

The battle largely runs along class lines. Pro-choicers are a small percentage of party activists and a minority of party voters, but they are a large percentage of big donors. Wall Street and Park Avenue—what might be called Hamptons Republicans—are socially liberal. One pro-lifer told me, "The pro-choicers aren't coalition Republicans but richborn Republican bluebloods who think abortion is an icky Catholic thing."

It is hard to imagine that the hundred-thousand-dollar checks they send in to the party are not accompanied by notes telling Haley Barbour, the Republican national chairman, to get away from the social issues so we can get back to economic issues, where we belong. A number of pro-life activists fear, in the words of one, that "Haley wants to take a dive on this—he was supported by the pro-choicers when he ran for chairman, and everyone wonders if there was a deal."

But committed anti-abortion activists don't want the plank changed. And unlike party intellectuals like Mr. Bennett, a longtime pro-life supporter who thinks the party's attention should shift to changing people's minds rather than backing a change of law, the activists have troops who work for candidates and vote for them.



## THE HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

Gary Bauer of the pro-life Family Research Council said he believes that the party establishment thinks it can get rid of the issue by saying, "We are against abortion, but we realize we can't get it removed through the law so we're gonna just talk about it." That, he says, is not a pro-life position but "a way of giving up." "If Republicans become only a party of free markets and low taxes," he adds, "that ultimately is not a governing vision. Our vision is the vision of the founders—only a good people can be free and can maintain their freedom, and the great underminer of public virtue is killing babies in the womb."

Mr. Bauer told me that he had spoken the past week in Marion, Ind., where he went to a little restaurant on the side of the road to speak to a local conservative group on all his issues. But 400 people showed up in a town of 30,000, and abortion was the only thing they asked about. They were worried, he said, that the party would change its position. "This is the issue everyone wants to go away, and it's the one issue I would bet everything I owned will not go away," he said.

Ross Perot taught Republicans one thing: You can leave. Before 1992, they didn't know that. Now they know. Dramatic walkouts are a very un-Republican thing, and no one expects it over abortion. But at least one pro-lifer told me how his side will respond if the anti-abortion plank is taken out. "They'll have a walkout from the convention and a rump movement that changes the election." They'll start an abolition party.

The pro-choicers say they too will rebel if the plank is not removed or seriously modified. "We don't rally, we don't threaten, we don't scream—but we vote," a pro-choice activist told me. "We pay 'em back at the ballot box."

To me it is absurd that a party that won landslides in 1980, '84 and '88 with the anti-abortion plank would change now because it can't win with it. It would be just as true—truer, I think—that they cannot win without it. If they keep the plank the way it is, the pro-lifers will stay, giving crucial time and resources to the party. And the pro-choicers will be angry, air their frustration to an eager media . . . and stay.

Especially if they get a pro-choice Vice President. Such as the man whose presence highlighted the problem and who could go some distance to solving it: Colin Powell. Despite his insistence that he has ruled it out, he had better brace himself for a serious lovebombing as Republicans try to get him to submit to the Vice Presidency.

## APPENDIX B

[The following article appeared as The Last Word column in Newsweek (Dec. 11, 1995), and is reprinted here with permission of Mr. Will (who is, we note, one of the most widely-read syndicated columnists, both in the U.S. and elsewhere).]

### Fanatics for “Choice”

*Partial-birth abortions, sonogram photos and the idea that  
“the fetus means nothing”*

*George F. Will*

Americans are beginning to recoil against the fanaticism that has helped to produce this fact: more than a quarter of all American pregnancies are ended by abortions. Abundant media attention has been given to the extremism that has tainted the right-to-life movement. Now events are exposing the extraordinary moral evasions and callousness characteristic of fanaticism, prevalent in the abortion-rights lobby.

Begin with “partial-birth abortions.” Pro-abortion extremists object to that name, preferring “intact dilation and evacuation,” for the same reason the pro-abortion movement prefers to be called “pro-choice.” What is “intact” is a baby. During the debate that led to House passage of a ban on partial-birth abortions, the right-to-life movement was criticized for the sensationalism of its print advertisements featuring a Dayton nurse’s description of such an abortion:

“The mother was six months pregnant. The baby’s heartbeat was clearly visible on the ultrasound screen. The doctor went in with forceps and grabbed the baby’s legs and pulled them down into the birth canal. Then he delivered the baby’s body and arms—everything but the head. The doctor kept the baby’s head just inside the uterus. The baby’s little fingers were clasping and unclasping and his feet were kicking. Then the doctor stuck the scissors through the back of his head, and the baby’s arms jerked out in a flinch, a startle reaction, like a baby does when he thinks that he might fall. The doctor opened up the scissors, stuck a high-powered suction tube into the opening and sucked the baby’s brains out.”

To object to this as sensationalism is to say that discomforting truths should be suppressed. But increasingly the language of pro-abortion people betrays a flinching from facts. In a woman’s story about her chemical abortion, published last year in Mother Jones magazine, she quotes her doctor as saying, “By Sunday you won’t see on the monitor what we call the heartbeat.” “What we call”? In partial-birth abortions the birth is kept (just barely) partial to preserve the legal fiction that a baby (what some pro-abortion people call “fetal material”) is not being killed. An abortionist has told The New York Times that some mothers find such abortions comforting because after the killing, the small body can be “dressed and held” so the (if pro-abortionists will pardon the expression) mother

can “say goodbye.” The New York Times reports, “Most of the doctors interviewed said they saw no moral difference between dismembering the fetus within the uterus and partially delivering it, intact, before killing it.” Yes.

Opponents of a ban on partial-birth abortions say almost all such abortions are medically necessary. However, an abortionist at the Dayton clinic is quoted as saying 80 percent are elective. Opponents of a ban on such abortions assert that the baby is killed before the procedure, by the anesthesia given to the mother. (The baby “undergoes demise,” in the mincing words of Kate Michelman of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League. Does Michelman say herbicides cause the crab grass in her lawn to “undergo demise”? Such Orwellian language is a sure sign of squeamishness.) However, the president of the American Society of Anesthesiologists says this “misinformation” has “absolutely no basis in scientific fact” and might endanger pregnant women’s health by deterring them from receiving treatment that is safe.

Opponents of a ban say there are only about 600 such procedures a year. Let us suppose, as not everyone does, the number 600 is accurate concerning the more than 13,000 abortions performed after 21 weeks of gestation. Still, 600 is a lot. Think of two crashes of jumbo airliners. Opponents of the ban darkly warn that it would be the first step toward repeal of all abortion rights. Columnist John Leo of U.S. News & World Report says that is akin to the gun lobby’s argument that a ban on assault weapons must lead to repeal of the Second Amendment.

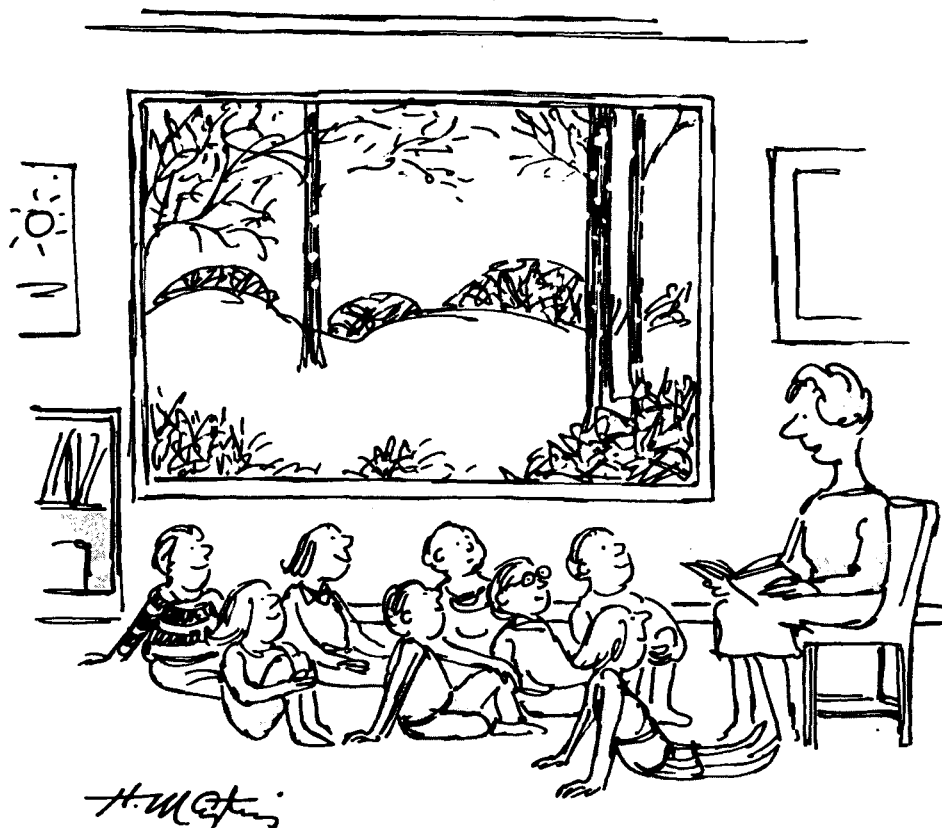
In a prophecy born of hope, many pundits have been predicting that the right-to-life “extremists” would drastically divide the Republican Party. But 73 House Democrats voted to ban partial-birth abortions; only 15 Republicans opposed the ban. If the ban survives the Senate, President Clinton will probably veto it. The convention that nominated him refused to allow the Democratic governor of Pennsylvania, Bob Casey, who is pro-life, to speak. Pro-choice speakers addressed the 1992 Republican Convention. The two presidential candidates who hoped that a pro-choice stance would resonate among Republicans—Gov. Pete Wilson, Sen. Arlen Specter—have become the first two candidates to fold their tents.

In October in *The New Republic*, Naomi Wolf, a feminist and pro-choice writer, argued that by resorting to abortion rhetoric that recognizes neither life nor death, pro-choice people “risk becoming precisely what our critics charge us with being: callous, selfish and casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of human life.” Other consequences of a “lexicon of dehumanization” about the unborn are “hardness of heart, lying and political failure.” Wolf said that the “fetus means nothing” stance of the pro-choice movement is refuted by common current practices of parents-to-be who have framed sonogram photos and fetal heartbeat stethoscopes in their homes. Young upscale adults of child-bearing age are a solidly pro-choice demographic group. But they enjoy watching their unborn babies on sonograms, responding to outside stimuli, and they read “*The Well Baby Book*,” which says: “Increasing knowledge is increasing

APPENDIX B

the awe and respect we have for the unborn baby and is causing us to regard the unborn baby as a real person long before birth . . .”

Wolf argued for keeping abortion legal but treating it as a matter of moral gravity because “grief and respect are the proper tones for all discussions about choosing to endanger or destroy a manifestation of life.” This temperate judgment drew from Jane Johnson, interim president of Planned Parenthood, a denunciation of the “view that there are good and bad reasons for abortion.” So, who now are the fanatics?



*‘Now, let’s pull on our snow suits and go outside and make snowmen or snowwomen or snowgays.’*

THE SPECTATOR 19 November 1994

## APPENDIX C

[The following first appeared as an On Society column in U.S. News & World Report (Nov. 20, 1995), and is reprinted here with the author's permission. Mr. Leo is a contributing editor of U.S. News, and a nationally-syndicated newspaper columnist.]

### Harder hearts on abortion

*John Leo*

“Partial birth” abortions are unsettling even to read about—the only version of abortion in which fetuses, either viable or near viability, are partly visible outside the body while alive and inches away from birth before being dispatched.

They are typically performed at 20 to 24 weeks, but sometimes later. The fetus is manipulated so that its feet and sometimes part of its body are outside the mother. The head is left in the uterus. Then the skull is pierced and the brain is suctioned out, causing skull collapse and death.

Why is the head of the fetus left inside the uterus when the removal of the brain takes place? “Avoiding trauma to the cervix” is usually cited as the reason, but the bottom line is really legal. Stopping the head just short of birth is a legal fig leaf for a procedure that doesn't look like abortion at all. It looks like infanticide.

Brenda Shafer, a registered nurse who supports abortion rights, says she witnessed three of these operations during a brief assignment to assist Dr. Martin Haskell at an Ohio abortion clinic in 1993. She says the three fetuses, two normal and one with Down's syndrome, all three 25 or more weeks along, were alive when Dr. Haskell inserted scissors into their skulls. “I still have nightmares about what I saw,” she said in a letter to an antiabortion congressman in urging passage of the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act.

Abortion-rights supporters have greeted the partial birth issue as the beginning of a new crusade to undermine *Roe v. Wade*. For some abortion opponents, it obviously is. But it also is true that a great many Americans, on both sides and in the middle, are deeply troubled by the brutality and questionable morality of this particular procedure. It deserves to be judged on its own.

“Costly vote.” In the House vote, a dozen pro-choice congressmen, including Ted Kennedy's son Patrick, joined the lopsided majority and voted to ban partial birth procedures. They did this knowing they face some aggressive retribution from the abortion-rights lobby without gaining any support from the antiabortion side. “It was a costly vote,” said Rep. Jim Moran of Virginia, an abortion-rights backer. “I'm not going to vote in such a way that I have to put my conscience on the shelf.”

It should be noted that the abortion lobby is having trouble getting its facts straight. After Brenda Shafer made her statement, Dr. Haskell said he didn't recall any such person working at his clinic. An employment card was produced. Then Rep. Patricia Schroeder and others extracted a nondenial denial from Dr.

## APPENDIX C

Haskell's head nurse, saying that Brenda Shafer "would not" have been present at the three abortions she said she saw.

Kate Michelman and other abortion-rights lobbyists insisted that partial birth abortion is "confined to extraordinary medical circumstances" and that anesthesia "causes fetal demise . . . prior to the procedure." Not true. A 1993 interview with Dr. Haskell in an American Medical Association newspaper quotes him as saying that 80 percent of these procedures are elective and two thirds occur while the fetus is alive. Dr. Haskell wrote a letter strongly implying he was misquoted. But an audiotape was produced showing that he wasn't.

And Michelman said, "It's not only a myth, it's a lie" that partial birth abortions are used to eliminate fetuses for minor defects such as cleft palates. But abortion practitioner Dr. James McMahan already had told Congress he had personally performed nine of these procedures solely because of cleft palates. Compared with the abortion-rights lobby, the O.J. defense looks obsessively ethical and tightly focused on verifiable truth.

In an article last month in the *New Republic*, feminist Naomi Wolf, an advocate, wrote that "with the pro-choice rhetoric we use now, we incur three destructive consequences . . . hardness of heart, lying and political failure." She wrote: "By refusing to look at abortion within a moral framework, we lose the millions of Americans who want to support abortion as a legal right but still need to condemn it as a moral iniquity."

The partial birth issue is a good time for abortion-rights supporters to reclaim the moral framework that Wolf says they relinquished. This repellent procedure goes way too far. No other Western nation, to my knowledge, allows it. It was unanimously condemned by the American Medical Association's council on legislation. (The full association later decided to duck the issue and take no position.)

Those who defend it reflexively because it may lead to other legislation are in the exact position of gun lobbyists who shoot down bans on assault weapons because those bans may one day lead to a roundup of everybody's handguns. They refuse, on tactical grounds, to confront the moral issue involved. More of the abstract hardness that Wolf writes about.

Killing a five-month or six-month fetus that's halfway down the birth canal raises a moral issue way beyond that of ordinary abortion. It's perfectly possible to support a woman's right to abort and still think that the anything-goes ethic of this horrific procedure has no place in a culture with any reverence left for life.

## APPENDIX D

[The following column appeared in the *New York Post* on December 20, 1995, and is reprinted here with permission of Mr. Kerrison (all rights reserved).]

### Bill's abortion stand is heartless

*Ray Kerrison*

Of all the things President Clinton will do in his term of office, none will be so heartless and misguided as his planned veto of legislation to ban partial-birth abortions.

This procedure is so diabolically violent that, when confronted with its brutality, the House of Representatives and the Senate voted overwhelmingly to banish it from American life.

It is so repugnant that Congress approved a prison term and steep fine for doctors who perform it.

It is so sickening that many pro-choice Democrats—men and women—crossed the line and voted in favor of the ban.

Only one person in America is standing in the way—the president.

The White House announced that Clinton would veto the bill because it “eroded a woman’s right to choose.” The defense is indefensible, given the abhorrent details of the act. In partial-birth abortions, performed after 20 weeks’ gestation, the baby is extracted feet first from the womb and through the birth canal until all but its head is exposed.

Surgical scissors are then thrust into the base of the baby’s skull and the brain is sucked out by a catheter.

The procedure is an atrocity, a fact that has been duly recognized by Congress.

The House voted 288 to 139 to ban these abortions—a margin wide enough to override a presidential veto. The Senate voted 54-44 for the ban, not enough to kill a veto.

So it comes down to the president.

Regrettably, he and his wife, Hillary, while pretending to want abortion to be “safe, legal and rare” have been the fiercest promoters of abortion in all its forms, not only in the United States, but abroad, as well.

The misinformation disseminated about partial-birth abortions is dismaying.

Last Friday, the *Daily News*, in an editorial supporting partial-birth abortions, claimed they were performed only if the woman’s life was in danger or if the “fetus” suffered from medical problems.

False. Dr. Martin Haskell of Dayton, Ohio, a pioneer in this abortion method, wrote a paper describing the technique. He wrote that he “routinely performs this procedure on all patients” who have been pregnant for 20 weeks or more. He said that 80 percent of the abortions were “purely elective.” In other words, they had absolutely nothing to do with the mother’s or the baby’s health.

#### APPENDIX D

The Daily News reported that the anesthesia given to the woman “kills the fetus before the full procedure takes place.”

False. Dr. Haskell said he performed these abortions only under local anesthesia, which would have no effect on the baby.

In congressional testimony, the American Society of Anesthesiologists said claims such as those published in the Daily News have “absolutely no basis in scientific fact.”

Eyewitness accounts tell the story. Brenda Pratt Shafer, a registered nurse from Dayton, told the House committee that when she was assigned to the Women’s Medical Center, a local abortion clinic, she accepted the post without reservation because she was “very pro-choice.”

On the third day, she stood at Dr. Haskell’s side as he performed three partial-birth abortions.

“What I saw is branded on my mind forever,” she said. “Dr. Haskell delivered the baby’s body and arms, everything but the head. The baby’s little fingers were clasping and unclasping and his feet were kicking.

“Then the doctor stuck the scissors through the back of his head, and the baby’s arms jerked out in a flinch. The doctor opened up the scissors, stuck a high-powered suction tube into the opening and sucked the baby’s brains out.”

Haskell repeated the procedure two more times. It devastated Mrs. Shafer.

“I have been a nurse for a long time and I have seen a lot of death—people maimed in auto accidents, gunshot wounds, you name it,” she said.

“I have seen surgical procedures of every sort, but in all my professional years, I had never witnessed anything like this. After I left that day, I never went back.”

The sentiment is widespread. Former Mayor Ed Koch, who is also pro-choice, talked about these abortions on his radio show one day. He read how they were performed and concluded, “That’s murder.”

Sen. Edward Kennedy does not see it that way. Opposing the bill, he said it is “extremist legislation at its worst.”

That’s very curious, because the senator’s son, Rep. Patrick Kennedy, a Rhode Island Democrat, voted for the legislation.

Teddy apparently thinks his own son is an extremist. The father, of course, is the real extremist.

If President Clinton vetoes the legislation, as promised, it will be a dark day in American life.

We would forfeit the right to call ourselves civilized.



## APPENDIX E

[*The following column appeared in the Washington Times (November 6, 1995) and is reprinted here with permission (© 1995, Creators Syndicate).*]

### Horror corner of abortion zealotry

*Mona Charen*

“This bill is a product of an absolutely chilling fanaticism.” So said Rep. Nita Lowey, New York Democrat, of the 288-to-139 vote to outlaw partial-birth abortions last week.

She’s right, but the fanatics are not, as Ms. Lowey would have it, “the House Republican leadership” and the “zealots on the other side.” What the debate demonstrated clearly was that abortion supporters are the rigid ideologues here, unwilling to consider even the mildest and most limited restrictions on the “right” to abortion.

Their tactics, though they would loathe the comparison, are quite reminiscent of the National Rifle Association’s. Any regulation of gun ownership, even registration, is resisted fiercely on the “camel’s nose under the tent” theory.

Advocates of unlimited abortion argue that what abortion opponents are seeking is nothing less than the rollback of *Roe vs. Wade*. The NRA is certain that every gun restriction is a mere prelude to confiscation.

In both cases, the zealots are right about their opponents but wrong about the American people. Anti-gun crusaders do fantasize about outlawing all gun ownership. And pro-lifers would like to see abortion severely limited.

But the American people come down somewhere in the middle on both issues and are likely to regard as extremists those who oppose even the most reasonable restrictions.

Abortion foes did the smart thing last week by focusing on an abortion procedure that all reasonable people should agree is barbarous. Of the 1.5 million abortions annually, about 13,000 are late-term abortions. Performed after the 20th week of gestation, when the fetus is 7 inches long or more, partial birth, also called “intact D and E,” involves pulling the fetus out of the birth canal feet first. The doctor then makes an incision in the skull with scissors and suctions the brain out of the skull so that the head can better fit through the cervix.

It is ghastly and horrifying, which is why very few doctors will admit to performing such abortions. But the other two alternatives to late-term abortions are also vile. A standard D and E involves dilating the cervix, cutting the fetus to pieces inside the womb and then suctioning it out. Induced labor is the only remaining method for aborting a late-term fetus, but this is avoided because of the pain and anguish for the woman.

Perhaps the partial-birth abortion is particularly gruesome because it mimics—and mocks—the true journey of birth. To see a fully formed baby pulled from its mother by the feet, only to have its brains sucked out is horror-film

APPENDIX E

material. Just ask the nurses who assist at such procedures. But this is what pro-choice advocates have backed themselves into defending.

Because they cannot face the grotesque reality, opponents of last week's legislation retreated into denial and lies. Rep. Charles T. Canady, Florida Republican, sponsor of the legislation, came equipped with charts showing exactly what happens in these abortions. That was too much for Rep. Patricia Schroeder, Colorado Democrat, who moved that Mr. Canady be prohibited from displaying the drawings because it violated the "order and decorum" of the chamber. The truth, as chastened pro-choicer Naomi Wolf recently acknowledged, cannot be evaded by being called bad taste.

But the truth took even bigger blows in the press. Nearly every radio and television report on the vote (and I recall as particularly egregious National Public Radio's account) described the procedure as "obscure" and "performed only to save the life of the mother." In fact, the legislation specifically excludes those abortions performed when the mother's life is in danger. Moreover, Dr. Martin Haskell, originator of the technique, admitted in an interview with American Medical News: "In my particular case, probably 20 percent are for genetic reasons, and the other 80 percent are purely elective."

No other civilized country on Earth maintains an abortion regime that is so radical as to permit even late-term abortions when the mother's life is not in danger. It is pro-choice forces, who fiercely resisted even this mild legislation, who stand revealed as "zealots."



*'"Woman lion" if you don't mind - not lioness.'*

THE SPECTATOR 6 May 1995

## APPENDIX F

[The following article first appeared as a Commentary column in the *Los Angeles Times* (Nov. 10, 1995) and is reprinted here with the author's permission. Dr. Walker is a member in political philosophy at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, N.J.]

### Why Stop at the Third Trimester?

*Logically, if partial-birth procedures are allowed, advocates must argue that life doesn't start till the umbilical cord is severed.*

*Graham Walker*

Faced with the need to defend the legality of an abortion procedure that nearly everyone recoils from, pro-choice advocates have resorted to an argument with disastrous consequences for their own cause. When she said that partial-birth abortions are no more “gross” or “revolting” than hip-replacement surgery, Rep. Patricia Schroeder (D, Colo.) made a tactical *faux pas* that a good media consultant could have prevented. But her principal argument against the bill constituted a major strategic error. She insisted that doctors only use the procedure when a woman's life is threatened or when the fetus is fatally deformed. And with television cameras rolling on the House floor, Schroeder asked repeatedly whether women ever agree to such a procedure for “frivolous reasons.” Answering her own question, she proclaimed passionately, “No, they do not!”

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D, Calif.) picked up the same theme a few days later on ABC's “Nightline.” This kind of abortion, Boxer said, is a “horrible procedure and terribly, terribly tragic.” But it nevertheless shouldn't be outlawed because it is used only when the mother's life is at stake or when “a mom and dad find out that this baby that they are so wanting to have in their family has gotten into a terrible circumstance.”

Although the Senate dealt a blow to pro-life forces by sending the measure to the Judiciary Committee Wednesday rather than voting, this delay is clearly temporary. Committee hearings will give even greater exposure to the gruesome photos and diagrams featured in the House debate. Thus the arguments offered by Schroeder and Boxer will come back to haunt the pro-choice movement, especially if the debate over partial-birth abortion is the first skirmish in a battle over the question of when life—or legally recognizable life—begins.

The problem with the argument is that it implicitly concedes the principles of those whom Schroeder called “anti-choice extremists.” It buys into the notion that a woman's reasons are properly the object of public evaluation. Schroeder and Boxer didn't stick to pro-choice logic. They didn't oppose the criminalization bill on the grounds that a woman's reason for choosing an abortion is no business of anybody's except the woman and possibly her doctor. Instead, they opposed the bill on the grounds that the reasons women elect this particular abortion procedure are “good” reasons, not frivolous ones. But by this logic, women

## APPENDIX F

who resort to abortion for reasons most people consider “bad” or “frivolous” might well be criminalized. And polls seem to show considerable public support for criminalization or at least restriction of abortions that are not done for “good” reasons like rape, incest or to save the life of the mother.

Schroeder’s and Boxer’s arguments inevitably raise the question their opponents want raised: What is it about this procedure that would keep them from defending its use for “frivolous” reasons? What is it that is “horrible” and “tragic?” President Clinton’s triad of “safe, legal and rare” raises the same question more generically: Why should abortion be rare? Surely, it’s not because of the medical dangers to the woman, since those are covered under the term “safe” and since medical technology is constantly gaining on the dangers. In both cases, the answer is as obvious as our reluctance to state it: the human quality of the object of the procedure.

There is only one way to evade the problem of this inconvenient being. Pro-choice advocates must keep their logic pure. They must continue to insist that the fetus is an integral part of a woman’s own body, fundamentally no different from any other internal organ. They must insist that a woman is entitled to do whatever she wants with her body, for whatever reason she considers valid, and that no one else, not even Schroeder or Boxer or Clinton, is entitled to evaluate those reasons. Until birth—or as we must now say, until the birth process has reached its conclusion—this logic must be sovereign or else the pro-choice paradigm shatters under the weight of ordinary human sensibility.

This logic is the real reason for pro-choice opposition to the partial-birth abortion bill, and it is why the same people would be opposing it even if it offered generous exceptions for maternal health and fetal deformity concerns.

Of course, as the House sponsors of the legislation said, this reduces to about three inches the distance between our privacy rights and our homicide laws. And whatever their squeamishness about pro-life extremism, the majority of the public will never be persuaded that the fetus changes fundamentally between the moment when the first foot appears and the moment when the last bit of head pops through (as in the case of the footling breech presentation typically used in partial-birth abortion).

When some pro-choice purist without a media consultant gets around to proposing that legal personhood be delayed until the umbilical cord is severed, the game will really be up. Then even the mass public will have a hard time averting its gaze from the entire human developmental continuum. It would not necessarily follow to criminalize abortion from the moment of conception. But the new terms of the debate make it harder than ever to fudge the starkness of pro-choice doctrine: abortion by any means, for any reason, at any time, unhindered by legal, social or moral disapproval.

Extremism, anyone?

## APPENDIX G

*[The U.S. House of Representatives debated the "Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act" at great length; the entire debate appears in the Congressional Record, but we doubt that many of our readers ever see that famous publication, so we have reprinted here excerpts from the debate of Nov. 1, 1995, which we think give the "feel" of the often-heated rhetoric. The Members involved (in speaking order) are: Christopher Smith (R, N.J.); Patricia Schroeder (D, Col.); Charles Schumer (D, N.Y.); Charles Canady (R, Fla.); Tom Coburn (R, Okla.); Henry Hyde (R., Ill.); Barbara Vucanovich (R, Nev.) and Martin Hoke (R, Ohio). The final vote tally is also included.]*

**MR. SMITH:** Mr. Chairman, this is a historic day for our Nation. The coverup of abortion methods is over.

Today, Congress comes to grips with the specifics of what an abortion actually does, and it ain't pretty. From this day forward, we will no longer be able to say we did not know. We now know, and every Member of this Chamber should know, that every abortion takes the life of a child. Whether it be a partial-birth abortion or D&E abortion, where the baby is literally dismembered while in utero, or the suction abortions routinely done, thousands per day, where a high-powered vacuum, 20 to 30 times more powerful than a vacuum cleaner in one's home, literally dismembers the child. All of these methods kill the baby. This is all about human rights for children, and it is about preserving and protecting the right to life of baby girls and baby boys.

Somebody said this is anti-woman. Half of those little infants killed are baby girls. Let us not ever forget that. Then again, let's also remember what Dr. Haskel himself has said. I would like to repeat it very briefly. Dr. Haskel said and I quote: "The surgeon forces the scissors into the base of the skull." This is medical practice? And then a high-powered suction catheter is introduced, and the baby's brains are sucked out.

This is not medical practice.

This is child abuse.

**MRS. SCHROEDER:** Mr. Chairman, I yield 1 minute to the distinguished gentleman from New York [Mr. SCHUMER], a member of the Committee on the Judiciary.

**MR. SCHUMER:** Mr. Chairman, I would like to address my comments to those who might be for this bill. You know, the great debate on abortion is—of course, it all boils down to when do you think life begins, and those who are pro-life fervently believe, and I respect it, that life begins at conception. Others of us do not believe that, and we believe ultimately that the choice ought not be made by the Government but ought to be made by each individual convening with his or her maker.

Even if you believe that life begins at conception, why did you prohibit an amendment dealing with life of the mother? If it is the life of the mother versus the life of a child, why does this legislation impose the fact that it must be the life of the child that takes precedence over the life of the mother? That is what the bill does, plain and simple.

APPENDIX G

If you are so sure it did not, you would not have prohibited us in the rule from having a clause in the bill that says that if the life of the mother is at stake the choice should be between the woman and her doctor. That is the hypocrisy of this legislation.

**MR. CANADY:** Mr. Chairman, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Oklahoma [Mr. COBURN].

**MR. COBURN:** Mr. Chairman, this bill in no way limits the ability of the doctor to care for a woman whose life is at risk with a late-term pregnancy.

Having been involved in obstetrical care, delivering over 3,000 children, caring for women with complicated pregnancies, anencephaly, neural tube defects, hydrocephaly and all the major complications associated with that, this procedure is an unneeded, gruesome attack on life.

May God forgive this Nation for what we allow in terms of procedures to be performed on our unborn children.

**MRS. SCHROEDER:** Mr. Chairman, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Chairman, I am not a doctor. But I am a lawyer. I am a mother. I have been married 33 years. I think I belong in the Marriage Hall of Fame, and I will put up my family values against anyone.

I must say, as a woman today standing in this Chamber, I feel like I am in the Chamber of Horrors, because no one really talks about the mother. But let me begin my statement by reading a letter that we received from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists saying that they do not support or endorse this bill, but they are opposed to any law mandating a specific medical procedure and against criminalization of the procedure and these bills are flawed. They go on to say they have no idea where the rumor was that they supported the bill. It is incorrect. These are obstetricians and gynecologists whose main concern is the health of the mother, and they are also looking at the child.

What we are talking about today is rolling back the road to save motherhood that this country began on. If you look at 1920, 800 women died for every 100,000 births. If you look at 1990, we got that 800 down to 8, down to 8.

For most people, going through pregnancy is not difficult; but for some it can be life-threatening; and, fortunately, medical science has made some progress that has been able to deal with these life-threatening situations and also preserve the health of the mother so that if this pregnancy goes terribly wrong, they can have another one and be able to have the great privilege I have been able to have of being a mother.

Today, what this Chamber is saying is we are going to limit one of these procedures for doctors. We are not going to allow them to be able to say the life of the mother is an exemption. No, we were not allowed to offer that amendment on this floor, nor were we allowed to bring the health of the mother to this floor; no; no; no; no; no. We show charts, but we do not show the chart with the face of the mother, the family, the decisions made.

Does anybody here think someone would engage in a late-term abortion

## THE HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

frivolously? Do you think that they have not thought about this in the last minute? Do you think doctors would engage in this frivolously? No, no and no.

There is only a handful of these ever done in a year. There are tragic situations in which there are not many good choices yet.

We hear people over there saying "elective." It is not elective in the sense folks are claiming it is over there. Every doctor has said you only have limited procedures at certain points if you are concerned about the mother's health, and you must elect one of those.

What we are talking about today seems to be one that for some women can help preserve their life and is the safest and best for them in that circumstance. Why are we taking that away? Why does this Congress think they have a better idea of what is going on, and why do we insist on criminalizing the doctor that would try to listen to their patient's best needs?

Vote "no." This is terrible. We are gagging women. This is terrible. We are not listening, and if you want to know why most of the speakers today were women is because they understand what is happening here. Wake up, America. This is an outrage.

MR. CANADY: Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my time to the gentleman from Illinois [Mr. HYDE], the chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary.

MR. HYDE: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. I wish I had a lot of time. We got a very short hour of debate on this important issue.

I would like to talk about how you would not treat an animal this way. You would not take a coyote, a mangy raccoon and treat that animal that way, because it is too cruel. I would like to talk about Dr. Joseph Mengele or Dr. Kevorkian. We talk about interfering with the doctor.

Our job is to protect the weak from the strong.

But, no, I want to talk about a love story. Here is a letter that came October 30 to the gentleman from Florida [Mr. CANADY] from my own district, Oak Park, IL, Jeannie Wallace French. She says:

DEAR CONGRESSMAN CANADY: Opponents of H.R. 1833, "The Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act," claim that partial-birth abortion is justifiable when performed on babies with disabilities. Please consider the personal experiences of our family as you debate H.R. 1833 on the floor of the House.

In June of 1993 I was 5 months along carrying twins. My husband and I were notified that one of the twins, our daughter Mary, suffered from a severe neural tube defect. Mary's prognosis for life was slim, and her chance at normal development non-existent. Her severe abnormality complicated the twin pregnancy and specialists encouraged amniocentesis and Mary's abortion.

Though severely disabled, we knew that Mary was a member of our family and was entitled to live out her allotted time without being assaulted by instruments or chemicals. When it became clear that Mary, whose brain had developed outside of her skull (an occipital encephalocele) would not survive normal labor, we opted for a Cesarean delivery.

Born December 13, 1993, a minute after her healthy big brother Will, Mary lived 6

APPENDIX G

hours cradled peacefully in her father's arms. She was with us long enough to greet her grandparents and our close friends. She also gave a special gift to other children: The gift of life. On the day of her funeral we received a letter from the Regional Organ Bank of Illinois. Our daughter's heart valves were a match for 2 Chicago infants, critically ill at the time of Mary's birth. We have learned that even anencephalic babies and meningomyelocele children like our Mary can give life, or sight, or strength to others.

The death of a child is the most tragic experience many of us will ever face. As parents, we can do only what we can—insure that our children do not suffer. As we now know, when their natural time comes it can be comforting that their short life has become a gift to others.

Our daughter, living less than a day, saved the lives of two other children. Which of us, even after decades of living, can make the same claim?

Sincerely,  
Jeannie Wallace French

\* \* \* \* \*

**MRS. VUCANOVICH:** Mr. Chairman, as many of you know, I have 15 grandchildren. Two of my grandchildren, the miracle twins, I call them, were born early at 7 months. They were so tiny that they could fit in your hands, but they were perfectly formed little human beings and they are now 13 years old.

It makes me shudder to think that somewhere, perhaps even today, in this country that there are other little preborn human beings 7 months old in their mothers' womb that are going to be subject to this brutal, horrible procedure known as a parital birth abortion.

I am not the only one who finds this procedure horrifying. Recently the American Medical Association's legislative council unanimously decided that this procedure was not "a recognized medical technique" and that "this procedure is basically repulsive." . . .

**MR. HOKE:** Mr. Chairman, since many of my colleagues have already explained the procedure under debate today, I will spare our listeners an additional description. Suffice it to say that this is one of the most brutal, uncivilized assaults on human life imaginable.

Abortion is wrong to begin with, but this procedure is so grotesque as to disgust the moral sensibility of anyone exposed to it. . . .

While opponents of this legislation argue that the procedure is rarely performed, some of their cohorts belie this characterization . . .

Doctor McMahan was quoted in the January 7, 1990 Los Angeles Times, as saying "Frankly, I don't think I was any good until I had done 3,000 or 4,000" late term abortions. In his own literature, the doctor refers to having performed a "series" of more than 2,000 abortions by the partial birth method. . . .

*[The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 288, nays 139, answered "present" 1, not voting 4.]*



## APPENDIX H

[The following Abortion commentary first appeared in *The Weekly Standard* (Oct. 9, 1995), and is reprinted here with permission. Mr. Greenberg is editorial page editor of the *Little Rock Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* and a syndicated columnist. In 1969 he won a Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing. (© 1995, News America Publishing Incorporated.)]

### Culture of Death

Paul Greenberg

When the lady from the Arkansas chapter of Right to Life called and asked if I would accept its annual award for promoting the cause, I hesitated. Did she know she was talking not to a saint but a sinner? As an editorial writer back in 1973, I had thought—and written—that *Roe v. Wade* sounded like a pretty sensible decision.

It seemed simple enough back then. Thanks to *Roe v. Wade*, those relatively few Americans needing an abortion for good reason would no longer have to thread their way through a tangle of state laws, or fly to Sweden or somewhere. At last the decision would be safely left to the physician and patient, and that would be that. No one else need be concerned.

Here was an essentially private matter—abortion—that was on the periphery of medical and legal concerns, let alone social and political ones. Back then abortion wasn't a litmus-test issue. Nor did it seem an ongoing constitutional concern like federal-state relations, or the balance of powers between the executive and legislative branches. It dealt with just one limited, technical medical specialty. I confidently expected my first editorial on *Roe v. Wade* for the *Pine Bluff Commercial* to be my last on the subject.

In short, Right-to-Life was now proposing to give its award to somebody who couldn't tell a slippery slope from a ukulele.

I think I would have smiled indulgently back then if you had told me that the debate over abortion would grow far more intense 20 years down the road, that abortion would become the kind of moral test for American society that slavery once was, and that in *Roe v. Wade* we were seeing the *Dred Scott* decision of the 20th century.

What I didn't realize was that ideas have consequences, especially when they become embedded in law. The law, as they say, is a great teacher. What they don't say is that it can teach not only good but evil, not only peace but turmoil, not only life but death.

For some time after *Roe v. Wade*, I carried on a running debate with a local Baptist preacher over whether the state constitution should protect life. The preacher, Mike Huckabee, would later become that rarity, a Republican lieutenant governor of Arkansas. (He's now feeling out a race for the U.S. Senate.) On more than one occasion since, he has asked me what changed my mind about abortion. "A million and a half abortions a year" is the simplest answer. But

## APPENDIX H

there is more to it.

I hadn't realized the dimensions of the social and political changes *Roe v. Wade* would come to symbolize—and license. And how that change would devalue not only life but the tenor of society in general. No nation can approve violence against the most innocent and vulnerable, and expect the effects of that approval to be limited.

By 1995, what had seemed a purely private decision in rare circumstances would become a standard method of birth control, an industry, a political litmus test, a rite of passage . . . a central tenet of a whole culture that centers not around life, its promise and responsibilities, but around self, its creation and cultivation.

Those unalienable rights to life and liberty Mr. Jefferson mentioned in the Declaration seem to have been eclipsed by a sad emphasis on the pursuit of happiness. And for all the happiness that the unbridled right to an abortion is supposed to make possible, no political question since slavery seems so heavy with guilt, and its denial. Or else there would be no reason for those who favor abortion to call it something else, “choice” being the most popular euphemism and “reproductive freedom” the most ironic.

The signs of this culture of death are now so common that they no longer stand out. In politics and economics, pop culture and art, lifestyle long ago replaced life. The general coarseness of today's politics, today's economics, today's society did not spring up overnight; it is a consequence of a general disrespect for persons. When life ceases to be a right and becomes a power relationship, when any victims can be dismissed as unpersons, indignation and accusation will replace reason and respect in public discourse.

It's happened before. The brutalities of the Third Reich in the 1930s did not arrive without warning; they were a logical extension of the enlightened eugenics of the 1920s, and its concept of *liebensunwerten Lebens*, or life not worth living. And therefore worth destroying. In the growing acceptance of abortion and euthanasia, one can see the advancing pincers of the same brutalizing idea.

It was in 1988 that Walker Percy, in a letter to the *New York Times*, pointed out whither we are tending. It was such a good letter, the *Times* declined to print it. It was also a remarkably restrained analysis of the abortion issue, and remains one of the most concise summaries of just what is being aborted: “Rather than enter the fray with one or another argument, which, whether true or not, seems to be unavailing,” wrote Percy, “I should like to call attention to certain social and historical consequences which may be less well known, [for] once the line is crossed, once that principle gains acceptance—juridically, medically, socially—[that] innocent human life can be destroyed for whatever reason, for the most admirable socioeconomic, medical, or social reasons—then it does not take a prophet to predict what will happen next.” The rise of Kevorkianism is only the next wave of the general disdain for life that seems to be setting in. Others will follow as surely as one transgression leads to another.

THE HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

Academicians may argue whether these times are modern or post-modern, industrial or post-industrial, but one increasingly feels they are post-civilized. One recalls the response Gandhi is said to have made when, visiting London, he was asked what he thought of Western civilization. "I would be all for it," he replied.

Earlier in this century, Jose Ortega y Gasset wrote about the dehumanization of art. Now we witness the dehumanization of the culture in general. It is hard to imagine a poet at the tag end of the 20th century celebrating man in the words of a 16th century English playwright: "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals."

If man may still be seen as a paragon, he is no longer seen as an animal, a creature with a time to live and a time to die. Instead, man becomes self-creating, and therefore self-destroying, with an obligation only to self. A life becomes something to be designed, and to be destroyed at will—not sanctified, revered, celebrated, mourned.

It used to be said, in the kind of jest that is half serious, that Americans look upon death as a preventable disease. Now it can be said in all seriousness that we come to look on birth the same way.



*'Of course it'll end in tiers. They all do.'*

THE SPECTATOR 11 November 1995

WINTER 1996/113

## APPENDIX I

[Walker Percy, considered by many to have been the finest American novelist of his time (he died in 1990), was a longtime reader and good friend of this journal. We once asked him to write a letter to the *New York Times*—the point was to see if the *Times* would find it fit to print if it opposed abortion—which in due course he did. What follows is the text of his letter, and a subsequent follow-up note, just as he sent them to us, and as we printed them in our Spring, 1988 issue.—Ed.]

### A Letter to the Times

*Walker Percy*

January 22, 1988

The Editor  
The New York Times

Dear Sir:

The fifteenth anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision of the Supreme Court seems as good an occasion as any to call attention to an aspect of the abortion issue which is generally overlooked.

The battle lines between the “pro-life” and the “pro-choice” advocates are so fixed, the arguments so well known, indeed so often repeated, that it hardly seems worth the time to enter the controversy on the present terms. Thus, while it may indeed be argued that in terms of Judeo-Christian values individual human life is sacred and may not be destroyed, and while it is also true that modern medical evidence shows ever more clearly that there is no qualitative difference between an unborn human infant and a born human infant, the argument is persuasive only to those who accept such values and such evidence. Absent these latter, one can at least understand the familiar arguments for a “woman’s rights over her own body,” including “the products of conception.”

The issue then seems presently frozen between the “religious” and the “secular” positions, with the latter apparently prevailing in the opinion polls and the media.

Rather than enter the fray with one or another argument which, whether true or not, seems to be unavailing, I should like to call attention to certain social and historical consequences which may be less well known—call the attention, that is, of certain well-known and honorable institutions such as *The New York Times*, the United States Supreme Court, the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Organization of Women, and suchlike who, while distinguished in their defense of human rights, may not accept the premise of the sacred provenance of human life.

THE HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

In a word, certain consequences, perhaps unforeseen, follow upon the acceptance of the principle of the destruction of human life for what may appear to be the most admirable social reasons.

One does not have to look back very far in history for an example of such consequences. Take democratic Germany in the 1920s. Perhaps the most influential book published in German in the first quarter century was entitled *The Justification of the Destruction of Life Devoid of Value*. Its co-authors were the distinguished jurist Karl Binding and the prominent psychiatrist Alfred Hoche. Neither Binding nor Hoche had ever heard of Hitler or the Nazis. Nor, in all likelihood, did Hitler ever read the book. He didn't have to.

The point is that the ideas expressed in the book and the policies advocated were not the product of Nazi ideology but rather of the best minds of the pre-Nazi Weimar Republic—physicians, social scientists, jurists and the like who with the best secular intentions wished to improve the lot, socially and genetically, of the German people—by getting rid of the unfit and the unwanted.

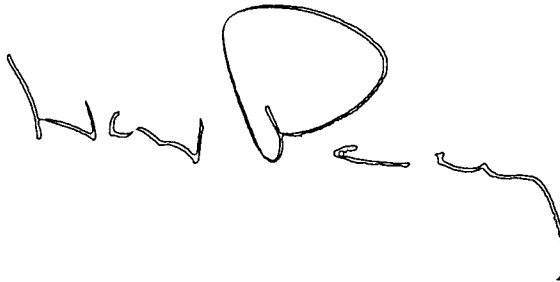
It is hardly necessary to say what use the Nazis made of these ideas.

I would not wish to be understood as implying that the respected American institutions I have named are similar to corresponding pre-Nazi institutions.

But I do suggest that once the line is crossed, once the principle gains acceptance—juridically, medically, socially—that innocent human life can be destroyed for whatever reason, for the most admirable socio-economic, medical or social reasons—then it does not take a prophet to predict what will happen next, or if not next then sooner or later. At any rate a warning is in order. Depending on the disposition of the majority and the opinion polls—now in favor of allowing women to get rid of unborn and unwanted babies—it is not difficult to imagine an electorate or a court ten years, fifty years from now, who would favor getting rid of useless old people, retarded children, anti-social blacks, illegal Hispanics, gypsies, Jews . . .

Why not?—if that is what is wanted by the majority, the polled opinion, the polity of the time.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Howard Rosenberg". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized hand. The first name "Howard" is written in a smaller, more compact script, while "Rosenberg" is written in a larger, more prominent script with a large, rounded 'R' and a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

APPENDIX I

*[Postscript: the eminent writer's letter did not appear in the Times. Nor was it acknowledged. On February 15, Mr. Percy wrote again:]*

I am sorry that you have evidently not seen fit to publish my letter of January 22 in your Letters-to-Editor section.

I should have thought that you would want to publish it, since it addresses what is a very controversial issue these days—even though the letter may run counter to your editorial policy. You are not known for suppressing dissent.

In the unlikely circumstance that you somehow did not receive the letter, I would be glad to furnish you with a copy.

The purpose of this letter is to establish for the record that you did in fact receive the first letter. For, if I do not receive an answer to this letter, it is fair to assume that you did.

*As we write (early April), Mr. Percy has received no reply.—Ed.]*

*[Post-postscript, 1996: The Times never answered either of Mr. Percy's letters.]*

## APPENDIX J

[The following article in slightly altered form appeared on the Opinion page of the Middlesex News (Massachusetts) on June 15, 1995; the author's original text is reprinted here with his permission. Professor Narrett teaches English at Framingham State College.]

### “Pioneers” talk about RU-486

Eugene Narrett

A few weeks ago the *Boston Globe* ran a long article featuring six of the 150 women who are testing RU486 at Planned Parenthood's clinic in Brookline, Mass. The most terrifying aspect of the report was the manner in which the women described the results. Their words, and those of the clinic workers, were filled with euphemisms, self-congratulation and absorption in the “experience” as if it was a course they had taken or a pâté they'd sampled. The dominant phrase was “I felt,” as in, “it took longer this way but I *felt* more whole, more complete.” The idiom mixed scientific detachment with new age narcissism.

The mystifications of this language are hard to avoid. For an example, look back at the first sentence of this essay. I wrote that the women “are testing RU486.” “Testing” is the language of science, of experiment, of the fastidious consumer and “focus group.” But the objects of study were developing lives they wished to discard. The sampled product was the drug, one of several items in the abortion aisle of our lifestyle supermart.

One of the women said, “I felt two or three sharp cramps, and then I expelled the pregnancy.” But it was not “a pregnancy” that had been “expelled.” The pregnancy had *been* ended by the mother and Planned Parenthood employees. What had been expelled was a developing human life.

The euphemisms of the abortion industry remind us that it is not only an act but an attitude, a dialect which explains in order to explain away, which lies while seeming simply to describe.

The mother who had “expelled” her “pregnancy” seemed to have some sense of what she truly had done. For she spoke to “*what had been aborted*,” wrote the reporter, almost acknowledging its humanity. The woman spoke to the ruined miracle, saying, “your timing's really bad. But I don't hate you. I'm making the decision with you in mind.” She did it for the child, she implied.

Proclaiming one's sensitivity is a contemporary cult. The claims grow louder as the violence mounts. Consider the logic of this “therapeutic” explanation. The woman said to the destroyed life, “*your timing's really bad*,” as if the embryo had snuck up unbidden. How can one say the timing of an embryo, growing toward the light, is bad? Its growth reflects the actions of the adults who created it.

“I'm making this decision with you in mind,” the unwilling mother added. “I hope you'll come back to me when I'm ready to love you.” Come back when I'm ready. Perhaps during life's next commercial break.

#### APPENDIX J

Consider the self-pity and self-delusion of these words to a life unable to speak but striving to live. The adult wants to be excused by the life she destroys. But that life can't answer; that life will not "come back."

This tone of self-indulgent obfuscation pervaded Planned Parenthood's account of these cozy "experiences." "It was very sweet in a way," one aborter remarked. "We were all wrapped in blankets and they fed us ginger ale and cookies." It was like a little party, a regression to childhood.

Two other women took a more assertive view. "As soon as I was pregnant, I separated from it immediately," one said. "It looked like a sea urchin when it came out. It had these prawny-looking things on it." *It, it, it.* Nothing but fact for her. Another said she preferred RU486 to surgical abortion (this was at least the second abortion for all involved. They are skilled shoppers.) "The drug gave me a deeper sense of what it was all about," she noted. "I liked having more control with the pill. My body, not a doctor, did the work." She was proud. She was in control. She "did the work."

"All were professional women," the reporter noted. "They consider themselves pioneers." Now we know what to call them: not participants, accomplices, sinners or clients, but "pioneers," the avant garde of a new faith into which our leaders mean to draft more and more young women.

All those interviewed say they plan to have children in the future. One wonders if the pioneering attitudes they've practiced will stand them in good stead as mothers, wives or human beings. What have they learned about commitment and responsibility? About a dizzying omnipotence?

Planned Parenthood says "the experience so far has been positive," and a clinic worker offers this solace to those opposed: "The RU486 process causes women to face the consequences of their actions." Does it? But the developing life was the consequence. While it disappears down the toilet, the televisions blare, the cookies stale, and a "pioneer" prepares to resume her profession, feeling "more whole, more complete."

Sex, life, death, marriage, illegitimacy all now are choices, none better or worse than another. Worshippers of choice have twisted the twin strands of science and therapy into an idol that transforms language and thought. It is a cult in which killing makes one "whole" and empty means "complete."

Planned Parenthood invites us to find some comfort in these wonders. But we do not.



## APPENDIX K

*[The following news story appeared in the London Sunday Telegraph on November 12 (Miss Macdonald is the paper's Health Correspondent). It is reprinted here with permission (© The Telegraph plc, London, 1995).]*

### Mothers pressed to abort Down's babies

*Victoria Macdonald*

Support groups for families of Down's syndrome children have accused the medical profession of putting expectant mothers under undue pressure to terminate their pregnancies when there is a chance that they are carrying a baby with the chromosomal defect.

The groups hit out after the controversy last week over the two mothers whose amniocentesis test results were mixed up, with one mother having her pregnancy aborted because she had been told wrongly that it had the syndrome.

The second mother later had an abortion at 20 weeks when it was confirmed that it was her baby which had Down's syndrome. Addenbrooke's NHS Trust in Cambridge, where the test results were analysed has started an inquiry.

But yesterday the Down's Syndrome Association, which provides support and information for families, said that throughout the debate there had been an assumption that the termination of the life of the baby with Down's syndrome was desirable.

Anna Khan, the association's director, said there had been no acknowledgement given to the contribution made by people with Down's syndrome to family life and the wider community.

Mrs. Khan also said there was disturbing anecdotal evidence that women were being pressured into having abortions by doctors following a positive test for the syndrome.

"We get three to four calls a day from women who are treated with astonishment when they say they are not going to terminate or who tell their doctors they want an amniocentesis test but they intend to carry on with the pregnancy regardless of the result," she said. "They are being told that they are irresponsible for bringing the child into the world."

Down's syndrome is a genetic condition in which the person has 47 instead of the usual 46 chromosomes, resulting in varying degrees of learning disability.

Phyllis Bowman, of the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, also accused the medical profession of giving a negative view of Down's children.

"The result is that they are pushed into an abortion or, if the child is born, they are regarded as a second-class citizen," Mrs. Bowman said.

A study conducted at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London earlier this year found that despite a fall in the overall birth rate in England and Wales, the incidence of Down's syndrome in the unborn rose from 1,063 in 1989 to 1,137 in 1993—the latest figures available.

APPENDIX K

This was partly attributed to more cases being discovered by increasingly sophisticated antenatal screening and partly to the rising number of pregnancies in older women, who are statistically more likely to conceive Down's babies.

Where cases were diagnosed prenatally, 92 per cent of the pregnancies were terminated and the number of live births fell from 764 in 1989 to 615 in 1993.

Annette Bertram, of Headley Down in Hampshire, was not offered a test when she was pregnant with Aimee, now aged four-and-a-half, because she was 27 and not old enough to be thought to be at risk. Now she is pregnant with her third child, she said she had had tests "thrown" at her. "I have been very firm in turning them down," she said.

When Aimee was born, Mrs. Bertram and her husband were told by a geneticist that Aimee would be dependent on them for the rest of their lives.

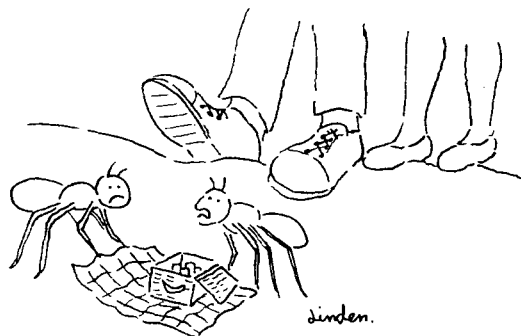
But Aimee already attends a mainstream school and has a higher than average reading ability for her age.

Mrs. Bertram said: "People assume that Down's syndrome children are all the same. She was labelled and her progress was decided at the point she was born."

Dr. Peter Doherty, who has helped to establish a clinic for Down's syndrome at the Hospital of St. John and St. Elizabeth in London, said Down's children had varying degrees of ability.

"There are those with A-levels and I know of one who is bilingual. If they have adequate clinical treatment they will improve considerably," he said.

With Dr. Margaret White, whose granddaughter Anna died aged five, Dr. Doherty has established the Lejeune clinic, named after the Frenchman who first detected the chromosomal abnormality which causes Down's syndrome. The clinic, sponsored by the Guild of Catholic Doctors and the Anna Fund, will be officially opened on December 7 and will carry on Dr. Jerome Lejeune's work, including looking for mineral and vitamin deficiencies in those with Down's syndrome.



*'Here they come, spoiling the picnic again.'*

## APPENDIX L

*[The following article appeared as The Editor's Notebook column in the London Sunday Telegraph on November 19 (Mr. Lawson was previously the editor of The Spectator magazine). It is reprinted here with permission (© The Telegraph plc, London, 1995).]*

### “Sorry” is not enough

*Dominic Lawson*

“We have offered an unqualified apology to these two families. Our staff are devastated that such a mistake, which has never happened here before, could have occurred.” This, in its entirety, was the official response from Addenbrooke’s Hospital in Cambridge, after its mislabelling of samples taken from two mothers’ wombs led to the abortion of a baby wrongly identified as having Down’s Syndrome.

Apologies, especially from the medical establishment, are always welcome. But the hospital should not be allowed to plant the impression in the public’s mind that this loss of a perfectly normal child is somehow a unique case either for Addenbrooke’s or the NHS as a whole. It is commonplace, and a direct result of the system of antenatal genetic screening.

The only way in which the existence of Down’s Syndrome in the unborn child can be conclusively proved is by taking samples of foetal tissue through invasive surgical techniques. These have, on average, about a one in 200 chance of causing a spontaneous abortion. Given that such procedures are offered free by the NHS to all expectant mothers over 35, and also to many younger mothers-to-be, it is obvious that there must have been many hundreds of babies with no genetic abnormalities who have been aborted by—to quote Addenbrooke’s director of medical genetics—“mistake.”

Modern medicine, however, regards these babies as necessary, if unfortunate, casualties in the war against abnormality. And Down’s Syndrome is far and away the commonest form of genetic abnormality. But a Down’s child is not an unhealthy child. Down’s is not a disease. Such a child is not infectious—or no more than any other child. Such a child suffers no pain or distress—or no more than any other child.

I would not have believed that such obvious points needed to be made, until I read the newspaper reports of the Addenbrooke’s incident: all of them consistently insisted on referring to the horror of the abortion of “the healthy baby,” as if the Down’s child which was also aborted after the mix-up of samples was discovered was, by definition, “unhealthy.” I am the parent of a child with Down’s Syndrome, Domenica, and she is a picture of rude health, strong and robust. Indeed, on a couple of occasions, while the rest of the family has gone down with heavy colds, Domenica has maintained an almost brutal imperviousness to the germs hurtling around her little head.

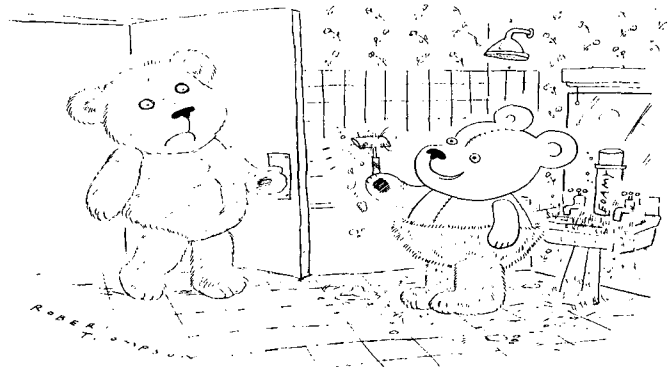
It is true that Domenica will have some degree of mental retardation. It could

APPENDIX L

be severe. It could be very slight. We will not know for some years. But mental handicap is not the same as mental illness. A slow child is not a lunatic. And above all, a child suffering from Down's Syndrome will not necessarily be unhappier than any other child. Indeed, children with this condition very often seem capable of greater love and happiness than those with a normal chromosomal make-up. Again, I would not have thought this point needed making, except that the barbaric consequences of modern eugenic screening seem to be gratefully accepted by many parents-to-be on the basis that children with Down's Syndrome will be so unhappy that they would be better off dead. And therefore they may, on occasion, be killed.

This is not an exaggeration. As a result of the 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act, it became legal to terminate a pregnancy up to the very end, up to the moment that the umbilical cord is cut, "if there is a substantial risk that the child would be seriously handicapped." In other words, what would be infanticide in respect of a "normal" child, is legal in respect of a child with a suspected handicap.

There is a mighty paradox in all of this. As a country, and as a people, we have become increasingly kind and understanding towards those with physical and mental handicaps. They are no longer automatically institutionalised. We have granted them equal rights to education; we have granted them equal rights to work; we have granted them equal rights to economic security. All we deny them is the equal right to life itself. And this is a much, much greater scandal than any mix-up of samples in a hospital in Cambridge.



*'Dad, where do I stop?'*

THE SPECTATOR 25 November 1995

## APPENDIX M

[What follows is the full text of Chapter 13 from the book *Good Children* (Newpoint Publishing Ltd., London) by Lynette Burrows, which the London Financial Times once described as "so old-fashioned it is positively radical." It is reprinted here with the author's permission (also see her article "A Wolf in Wolf's Clothing" in this issue).]

### A Handicapped Child

Lynette Burrows

*"Well, son; it looks like we are the only friends you've got!"*

I decided to include a chapter on having a handicapped child in the family, simply because one of mine is handicapped and it is something that, although it affects only a few people, interests many more. It is also something that is bound to cross the minds of prospective parents and many mothers wonder what they would do if it ever happened to them. It is worth passing on our experience if only because if we had known at the time what we know now, we would not have shed the tears we did then.

Everyone is always so gloomy about handicapped children, as if having a handicapped child were the very worst thing that could ever happen to you. I certainly know from my own experience that we were far more miserable at times because of the attitude people took to our child than we ever were because of what he was like.

True, one has to get used to the sheer shock of having a child that is classed as handicapped but, before long, one comes to realise that being a parent is not for the weak-kneed in any case. It is a tough job that absolutely requires you to mature and "cope." The parents of children who are delinquent, drug-takers or depressives also suffer and so do parents who lose a healthy child through disease or accident. In short, one realises that to have a child is to become uniquely vulnerable to suffering—regardless of whether that child is handicapped or not.

There have been many occasions when I have felt far more sorry for the parents of a chronically sick or difficult child than I ever felt for us. One can only accept the fact that the price of loving anyone is that, along with all the joy and pleasure, we are likely to spend at least some time grieving or worrying over them. It is the old maxim, expressed by William Faulkner: "Between grief and nothing, I choose grief." Unless one accepts that philosophy, one would be foolish ever to have children or even to fall in love.

Our second child was born, fortunately, at home and the midwife told me right away that he was a mongol. I was too stunned to speak for a while and just lay there trying to remember what mongols were! Chubby little people with funny eyes was all the information I could summon up and the midwife, mistaking the silence, said, "Never mind, dear, you can always put him in a home if his vacant eyes get you down."

## APPENDIX M

My husband, who had just brought us both a cup of tea, looked at the tiny bundle she had deposited in the cradle and said, "Well, son; it looks like we are the only friends you've got!"

All through the night we lay on the bed trying to come to terms with what had happened that evening. Our inexperienced minds, so unaccustomed to grief, longed to shake off the nightmare and return to a comfortable present. But it could not be done. The doctor came and went and another midwife; both, I now realise, practising that belief of the medical profession that it is a bad thing to encourage what may be groundless hope.

Finally, after a couple of hours' sleep, I awoke to find another midwife, a mountain of a woman, peering into the cradle. She had just called on her rounds but I do believe that a particularly sensible angel sent her because the sunshine of her personality put a different perspective on everything. "You have got a little 'natural,'" she said, with such love and warmth. "He'll be the joy of your life, don't you worry. You will never regret having him when you realise what he was sent to give."

She was the only one, of all the professionals, who ever got it right. That all you need to make you pick up any burden cheerfully is to feel that the sorrow will pass and that there is some purpose in it.

He was a lovely little baby right from the start and seemed to us to be particularly good just to make up for the anguish he had caused us. I fed him myself with no difficulty and he slept through the night from ten days old. His eyes were never dull or vacant and I searched his little face in vain for signs of what everyone felt was such a tragedy.

By one of those strokes of good fortune that often seem to happen when you need them most, I heard Rex Brinkworth on the radio a few weeks later, talking about mongol babies and his "Down's Baby Centre" at Birmingham. A letter to him at the BBC produced a reply by return and then some instruction sheets about how to systematically exercise and stimulate the baby at every stage of its development.

More important even than these valuable instructions were his own positive and helpful ideas on the subject. It was so nice to get away from the doleful tones of the inexperienced professionals whose one resource was to commiserate.

Here was the father of a child like ours and yet he was not lying slumped in his chair with his face on his shoulder, talking about a life-long burden being his lot. He was vigorous, funny and obviously enjoying a life in which his little daughter's progress and achievements were a major factor.

He even confessed to having had the same feeling of contrariness as we had had, when the doctor told him that his daughter "would never be anything but a vegetable." It was a feeling that the doctor was not qualified to make such a prophecy and that, whatever she was, he was going to do all he could to help his daughter develop her potential.

He introduced us to the term "Down's Syndrome" which is the correct name

for what is commonly known as mongolism. We used the term assiduously when Matthew was small; probably because we did not like the association of "Attila the Hun and the Mongol Hordes" with our baby!

However, after a couple of years I discovered that there were several people of my acquaintance who had taken my use of the correct name to mean that Matthew was not only a little mongol but he had Down's disease as well! After that, I felt it was more important to ensure that people understood what one was talking about and so use the two names as appropriate.

II have mentioned before that many professionals who work with handicapped children seem to believe that the worst thing you can infect parents with is hope—just in case it is false hope. However, this ignores the fact that many of the plans and ideas we have for all our children look, in retrospect, to have been rather optimistic and as redundant as the violins and drum-kits mouldering away with the looms and chemistry sets in the attic. By the time such hopes have not been realised, we have moved on to other aspirations that are also situated somewhere in a bright future. Hope is the means by which people find the enthusiasm to travel many otherwise dull roads and we can never seriously regret the efforts we make towards things; even when they fail.

Mr. Brinkworth lives and breathes hope and, because of that, his advice on helping handicapped children is very valuable. Particularly appropriate to us was the fact that his programme of things to do with the child was written on plain, foolscap sheets that you simply worked through. At that time, we were not quite up to seeing pages of photographs of handicapped children and wondering which one ours would be like.

In time one comes to recognise and put in affectionate context the different faces of handicap and not to feel frightened or put off by any of them. One grows in understanding with experience but it takes time to learn to love and respect your child for what he is without too much reference to the future.

Matthew sat up at nine months, well bolstered with cushions to stop him from keeling over. He walked at two and a half having spent more than a year getting about on his bottom with an amazing leg movement that he should have patented.

There was really nothing different about his progress except that it was slower than other children's. He was always loving and cheerful, responsive and obedient and he had a very normal sense of his own dignity and pride in achieving what he knew he could do.

He has always loved music and stories, games, walks and outings. His tape recorder is his favourite possession and company his greatest pleasure. He was then as he is now, small, slight and healthy and I never did anything different for him.

This last may come as a surprise to those who believe that being handicapped makes a child entirely different from other children. In fact, of course, their

## APPENDIX M

similarities are far greater than their differences and they are first and foremost children.

Although I do not know a great deal about other kinds of handicap, I do know that mongols are the largest single category of the mentally handicapped and they comprise nearly a third of the total. To me, unless they have other illnesses, they do not present a very great problem at all. It is far more likely to be their parents that are the problem or perhaps the attitude of the society into which they are born.

They are just what they are, and they neither threaten nor attack anybody. They give out a lot and, if they have the chance, many of them can contribute their labour in the simpler jobs the same as anyone else. They are, for example, nothing like as difficult a problem as the habitual criminal and yet our society has a hysterical attitude to them which can turn, in a moment, to outright rejection.

Parents on the other hand, may well be in the position of having created most of the behaviour problems associated with their child by being over indulgent. Like so many parents of spoilt children they feel that they have done their best for the child because they have had to work so hard to give him everything he wanted. The resulting ungovernable little beast is looked on with pity and further indulgence by friends and relations who wrongly think that the behaviour is because of the handicap rather than the spoiling.

It is natural for parents to want to indulge a child whom they feel has got difficulties but really, it does them no good. Indeed the resulting bad behaviour cuts the child off from other people in exactly the same way that it does with other ordinary children.

One advantage of having a large family is that everything is not left to the parents to decide. The children themselves play an unconscious part in correcting imbalances and providing stimulus where it is needed.

Certainly in Matthew's case, he has been extremely lucky to have several bossy, opinionated, caring peers to help and push him along. Being the eldest boy, they expect a lot of him and I doubt whether we would have discovered just how much he could actually do if it were not for them setting the pace and keeping him up to it.

They make very few allowances for him except, perhaps, in the case of teasing where he has not got the repartee to equal theirs. He has, however, developed a lofty way of dealing with their cheeky remarks and will say, "Don't be stupid, will you," in the tones of a bored aesthete.

In many instances his brothers and sisters had a direct motive for getting him to learn to do things because it relieved them of a job. In consequence of this he has learnt to pull his weight and is a responsible boy, far too sensible to allow a baby to climb the stairs or fall off a chair. He takes care of himself more or less completely and can do a very good job at cleaning and tidying a room. Despite the fact that he has an IQ of 70 or under, he enjoys very much the same



things as the other children. They all love ballet, music, theatre, and the cinema so, whatever the points on an IQ scale mean, you obviously do not need all that many of them to enable you to enjoy life.

It is very interesting how different is the attitude of our children to Matthew compared to that of my husband and me. We had a shock to get over initially with him but they have never known a time without him. Consequently, they did not have any expectations for him to fulfil and so cannot really see him as handicapped.

They get quite a few treats because of him through gestures of kindness being offered by local organisations. A free afternoon at the fair, for example, or tickets for the circus, or pantomime, for handicapped children "and their families"; there is never any shortage of volunteers to "ride shotgun" with him on such occasions. After one such enjoyable outing Sophie asked in conspiratorial tones, "What happens if they ever find out that Matty is not really handicapped?"

One of the unexpectedly pleasant things about having a handicapped child that you could never anticipate at the outset is the extent to which, because of him, you encounter the best side of people.

So many of those who work for or with the handicapped have a full-hearted tenderness for others that one just does not meet in many areas of life. I do not really know what it is, but something about the vulnerability of the handicapped seems to personify all sorts of inner weaknesses and incompletenesses which one does not normally see but which we all feel in some form or other. It is as if they are publicly enacting a heroic struggle with adversity which is an example to everyone and many people feel the significance of it.

It is a source of great inspiration and happiness to be so often reminded of the love in people; how much we need each other in order to express some things and how even the weakest have their part to play.

The question implicit in the remark of my old midwife, "when you realise what he was sent to give," she never answered. Perhaps she knew that there was no one answer and that people come to understand it each in their own way. Certainly it is an eventful journey that each parent makes from the time when they first have their handicapped child.

Initially, of course, it is your pride that takes the biggest knock. You do not realise, until you have a less than perfect baby, just how much the child is an extension of yourself; how important it is to you that in appearance, behaviour and potential it is along predictable lines and in keeping with your image.

It takes a good deal of self-adjustment to accept that this child will not be part of the armoury with which you face the world. It will not just be part of "that nice family" or "those lovely children." You will have to go deeper if ever you are to understand what it is all about.

Even when you do, it is difficult to express. There is an inscription at the start of *End of the Affair* by Graham Greene which runs: "Man has places in his heart

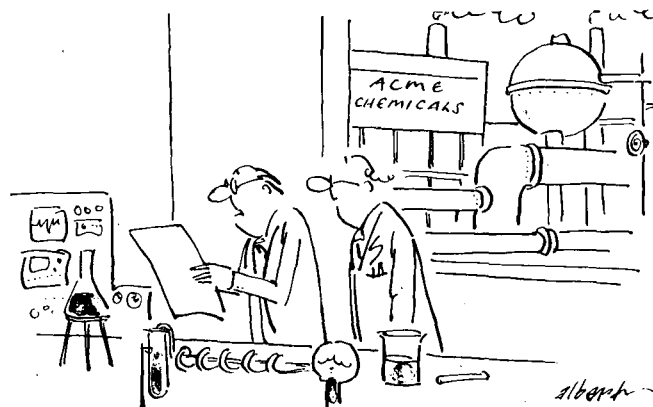
APPENDIX M

which do not yet exist and into them enters suffering that they may have existence." The development of these places in the heart provides the fountainhead of all our civilised values and no society which accepts and cares for its weaker members can ever fall completely into barbarism.

The family is a microcosm of a democratic society and within it the members learn many useful lessons from knowing someone who is handicapped. They learn that life-enhancing virtues like courage, cheerfulness, sympathy and goodwill can be present in a person who does not have much of the intelligence by which we set so much store.

Matthew is sixteen now and will be going to further education college in the autumn to begin the process of learning a simple trade. Apart from a short period, all his school life has been happily spent in mainstream education as part of a small group within a school, with their own specialist teacher. They join the other children for every kind of non-academic subject and activity, and Matty has benefitted enormously from always being surrounded by the pace and standards of ordinary behaviour.

For their part, the other children in the school have learnt a considerable amount in terms of sympathy and understanding from the children in the "unit." It is a lesson too profound even to try and describe but, I am sure, it is one of the reasons why children like Matthew were put on this earth in the first place.



*'This is tricky — everyone who took the placebo got better.'*

THE SPECTATOR 12 January 1991

## SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BOUND VOLUMES

**Subscriptions:** the *Human Life Review* accepts regular subscriptions at the rate of \$20 for a full year (four issues). Canadian and all other foreign subscriptions please add \$5 (total: \$25 U.S. currency). Please address all subscription orders to the address below and enclose payment with order. You may enter gift subscriptions for friends, libraries, or schools at the same rates.

**Additional Copies:** this issue—No. 1, Volume XXII—is available while the supply lasts at \$5 per copy; 10 copies or more \$3 each. A limited number of back issues from 1993 on are also available at the same prices. We will pay all postage and handling.

**Bound Volumes:** Volumes XVII (1991), XVIII (1992), and XIX (1993), and Volume XX (1994) are available at \$50 the copy, postpaid. Volume XXI (1995) will be available soon (at the same \$50 price); you may send advance orders now. Send all orders, along with payment in full, to the address below.

**Earlier Volumes:** while several volumes are now in very short supply, we can still offer a complete set of volumes for the first 16 years (1975-1990) of this review for \$700 the set. The volumes are indexed, and bound in permanent library-style hardcovers, complete with gold lettering, etc. (they will make handsome additions to your personal library). Individual volumes are available while our supply lasts, at \$50 the volume. Please send payment with order; we pay all postage and handling.

The *Human Life Review* is available from **University Microfilms, Inc.** (300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106-1346) as follows: in 35 mm microfilm from Volume V; on microfiche from Volume VII; and indexed and abstracted as part of a general reference database from Volume XVII, available on CD-ROM, magnetic tape, and on-line.

The *Human Life Review Index* is also available as part of a CD-ROM database from **Information Access Company** (362 Lakeside Drive, Foster City, California 94404).

*Address all orders to:*

**The Human Life Foundation, Inc.  
150 East 35th Street  
New York, New York 10016**

