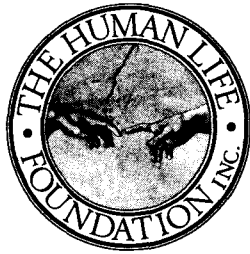


# the HUMAN LIFE REVIEW



SUMMER 1997

*Featured in this issue:*

William Murchison on . . . . Decrying Wolf Won't Do

Ellen Wilson Fielding on . . . Crying "Choice" Too Often

Lynette Burrows on . . . . . A Downfall by Upbringing?

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"Would God Choose Abortion?"

A Mini-Symposium on Naomi Wolf's "Pro-Choice and Pro-Life"

George McKenna • David Klinghoffer • Karina Rollins

Richard Brookhiser • Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

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Leon R. Kass on . . . . . The Wisdom of Repugnance

The Clare Boothe Luce on . . . . . Women & Abortion

*Also in this issue:*

Ruth Padawer • George Will • Tony Snow • Michael Novak

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE . . .

. . . for your summer reading, we bring you a collection of pieces “inspired” by feminist Naomi Wolf’s continued calls for the recognition of abortion as a “necessary evil.” Her *New York Times* Op Ed piece (April 3) was titled “Pro-Choice and Pro-Life”—perhaps many *Times* readers would like to believe the two can co-exist; we of course disagree, and we hope you will enjoy reading our “Mini Symposium.”

We would like to thank Leon Kass and *The New Republic* for permission to reprint Dr. Kass’ powerful essay on human cloning. It sheds much-needed light on the moral issues at stake in this “New Age” of reproductive technology.

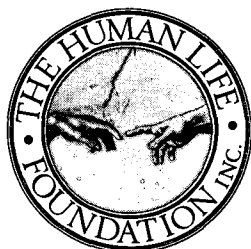
We thank *National Review* for permission to reprint both Michael Novak’s column (*Appendix D*) and Ellen Wilson Fielding’s review (*Appendix E*); it also happens that three of our symposium contributors—Richard Brookhiser, Karina Rollins and David Klinghoffer—are editors at *NR*. For subscription information, contact *National Review* at 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016.

Our European Editor Mary Kenny has recently come out with a book that may be of interest to our readers. Titled *Goodbye to Catholic Ireland*, it certainly deals with “life issues” as part of the broader cultural changes taking place in Mary’s native country. The book is available from Sinclair-Stevenson, an imprint of Reed International Books Ltd, Michelin House, 81 Fulham Road, London SW3 6RB, England.

Review contributor Wesley J. Smith has a new book just out (early June): *Forced Exit: The Slippery Slope from Assisted Suicide to Legalized Murder*, published by Times Books/Random House, which should be at your local bookstore (if not, ask for it!). We are relieved that the Supreme Court did not find a “constitutional right” to assisted suicide (in late June), but the battle is far from won, and Smith’s book both clarifies arguments and provides valuable information.

Thanks also to the *Bergen Record* for permission to reprint Ruth Padawer’s excellent report (*Appendix A*). And our continued thanks to the *Spectator* for their refreshingly funny cartoons.

MARIA MCFADDEN  
EXECUTIVE EDITOR



# the HUMAN LIFE REVIEW

Summer 1997

Vol. XXIII, No. 3

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## INTRODUCTION

WHO'S AFRAID OF NAOMI WOLF? Alas, that kind of *namecompoopery* seems inevitable, given the surname involved. At first laugh, we said we might title this issue "Decrying Wolf Once Too Often"—in the event, we may have accomplished precisely that, which is no joke—but let me explain how it happened.

Immediately after we finish one issue, it's normal to start talking about the next one; quarterlies seem like leisurely things, but in fact we have a great many pages to fill, and every desire to fill them with stuff our readers will *enjoy*. As it happened, we were just in that "talking" stage when (it was April 3 to be exact) our morning New York *Times* ran an Op-Ed-page essay by Naomi Wolf oxymoronically titled "Pro-Choice *and* Pro-Life" which got us all talking about *it*. And, in short order, far-flung friends and colleagues began calling, including our stalwart Bill Murchison, down in Dallas, who "opined" that there was enough think-food in it "for a whole issue." It was a prophetic remark, for which he has paid a price—he ended up being given our lead assignment, which in turn ended up being accurately titled "Decrying Wolf Won't Do"!

But we're getting ahead of our own story. In fact, Ms. Wolf has now authored three widely-discussed books, and has become a leading "feminist" spokesperson, not least on abortion. So we couldn't restrict our purview to one recent article, however provocative. Happily, Ms. Wolf's latest book had just come out in England, and our *Stakhanovette* over there, Lynette Burrows, said she'd gladly do us a piece on it. Meanwhile, "our" Ellen Wilson Fielding was reviewing the book for *National Review*, and agreed to expand on it for us.

So we were indeed looking at a "whole issue" issue, and we set about filling in missing pieces. After making sure that we would be permitted to reprint Ms. Wolf's Op-Ed piece—it wouldn't do to critique something our own readers had not read?—we asked a half dozen "experts" to add short commentaries for an *ad hoc* symposium; five of them agreed to do so.

Thus armed, we were in a position to make Mr. Murchison pay for his brilliant idea: we would obviously need a good "preface" for the whole thing—something that would bring our readers into the Big Picture and prepare them for all the particulars that would follow—Murchison was just the man for the job. Heaving a great sigh (the first one we've ever got *via* FAX), he agreed and, as you read our lead article, you will see that he carried it off in his accustomed high style.

Murchison begins with a swift synopsis of Ms. Wolf's precocious career as a

feminist spokesperson, from her “first literary hand grenade”—the bestselling *The Beauty Myth*—to her latest book, *Promiscuities*, and asks the obvious question about the extravagant attention her books have gained: “Is Naomi Wolf worth it?” He proceeds to answer his own question, in fascinating (and often amusing) detail, concluding that, whatever *else* can be said about her, Ms. Wolf “seems to be going our way.”

Then along comes our friend Ellen Wilson Fielding, to argue that, in her coolly-considered judgment, Naomi Wolf is going too *far*: specifically, Ellen zeroes in on yet another Wolf article—a Mother’s Day “Feminist Mom” piece she dashed off for the New York *Daily News*. As you can see, Naomi’s opinions, however casual, are much in demand. But in fact she has but one toddler daughter (aged two now), and it’s hard to imagine that she lacks domestic help? So it’s not surprising that Mrs. Fielding, with four young kids of her own (she’s home-schooling them too), finds it rather tiresome to hear Ms. Wolf argue that “contemporary women” are just *worn out* by “juggling families and careers” and thus in desperate need of help—Naomi proposes a wide range of “solutions” involving government, employers, and of course *husbands*. In Ellen’s view, the real problem is that feminists insist “choice” should mean getting whatever you *want*, whereas in real life you may have to choose denying yourself quite a lot just to get what you *need*—happiness comes from discerning the difference.

Next Lynette Burrows, our Cambridge correspondent, writes about (as distinguished from reviewing) Ms. Wolf’s *Promiscuities*, which was widely reviewed in the English press. In fact, the London edition (from Chatto & Windus) is a bit different from the U.S. one (Random House), including an altered Introduction—but the highly-*visible* difference is, the English cover sports a lush-colored profile of a nubile girl’s torso, while its American cousin merely has a black-and-white photo of a wistful *teenette*, her hair blowing around the long unlit cigarette dangling from her lips, below which the picture is modestly cropped off (we’d love to know *who* chose “virtual chastity” for American readers!). As Mrs. Burrows notes, the “suggestive but meaningless nude on the cover” is there “to boost sales and, no doubt for the same reason, the contents cover a fairly broad spectrum of safe, unsafe and deviant sexual activity.”

Sounds pretty awful? Mrs. Burrows (who has six children, by the way) obviously thinks it is: “One has the distinct feeling that Ms. Wolf simply would not be able to comprehend people for whom sex is not the center of the universe.” And then this: “The hateful social scene [that Wolf describes] is not created by a culture that does not value women’s sexuality—whatever that is supposed to mean. It is a culture that does not value *anything*.” But enough: read all about it yourself, it’s a *good* read—we were so impressed that we actually delved into *Promiscuities*, and while we can’t claim to have read . . . every word, we did enjoy some parts. For instance, after claiming that there have been “severe constraints on female desire” through the ages, Ms. Wolf writes bravely that in

## INTRODUCTION

“generation after generation, women—perhaps many women—in spite of whatever cultural obstacles have been placed in their paths, have remembered themselves” (whatever *that* means, you’ll find it on page 231, U.S. edition).

We now arrive at our “*ad hoc* symposium” on . . . Who else? But we wouldn’t be surprised if by now readers—perhaps many readers—are asking Mr. Murchison’s question: “Is Naomi Wolf worth it?” Based on what she’s actually *written*, we’d say certainly not. But obviously it’s not *what* she is saying, but rather that a “Leading Feminist” is saying anything at *all* about “guilt” and “remorse” for abortion that makes Ms. Wolf of interest to us. When her “Our Bodies, Our Souls” first appeared in *The New Republic* (October 15, 1995), it was instantly the talk of everybody who is *anybody* in the abortion controversy. That’s why we made it part of our “permanent record” by reprinting it *verbatim* (it ran to 15 of our large pages) in our *Winter*, 1996 issue as part of a full-blown Symposium (it ran over 50 pages).

Then, in the following issue (*Spring*, 1996) we reprinted the full transcript of Ms. Wolf’s appearance on William F. Buckley Jr.’s *Firing Line* TV show. In the next issue (*Summer*, 1996) we ran the “conversation” Ms. Wolf had with two of our editors (Maria McFadden and Anne Conlon), who met her in Washington for the interview, which ran a full 22 pages. (Pardon us: we know all these pieces are cited frequently elsewhere in this issue, but we thought it would be useful to summarize them in one place.)

Needless to add, we were not alone: every opinion journal we know devoted considerable attention to Ms. Wolf’s “startling” proposals. True, few of them were critical: nobody mentioned what *was* so startling, e.g., that Ms. Wolf was in effect proposing “that women say an act of contrition and *then* sin,” as a friend of ours puts it. But no matter: without question, Naomi Wolf changed the *focus* of the abortion debate; we’d go so far as to say that she paved the way for the radical change effected by the “partial birth” abortion horror—almost a quarter century after *Roe v. Wade*, most Americans finally recognize that abortion’s real victim is the *baby*.

Beg pardon: we’re getting ahead of ourselves again, so back to our “Mini Symposium.” You will find a short introduction (on page 33) that briefly describes the five contributions. Here, we should say a few words about the contributors. First, Professor George McKenna is “linked” to Ms. Wolf by happenstance: his own seminal article “On Abortion: A Lincolnian Position” had been published in *The Atlantic Monthly* just before Wolf’s *New Republic* article appeared, so that the two were often jointly discussed and compared in the media (yes, we reprinted McKenna’s entire text in our *Fall*, 1995 issue). The next three—David Klinghoffer, Karina Rollins, and Richard Brookhiser—are all “colleagues” of your servant.

Let me explain: for more than 30 years I worked for Bill Buckley at *National Review* which, as I trust everybody knows, was and *is* the *premier* conservative magazine in the U.S. (in the world, actually). Even after I officially retired to

*this* journal, we kept our offices in the same building; when *NR* had to move late last year, we tagged along, and now share the new space. So when I said that “we” discussed Naomi Wolf’s Op-Ed piece in the office, it included our *NR* friends, who were then invited to continue the discussion in print. As you will see, they do indeed have many interesting things to say.

As it happens, the final contributor, Professor Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, has written a few pieces for *National Review*, but that’s *because* she’s a well-known writer on a wide range of subjects, both literary and polemical. More, her books include *Feminism Without Illusions* and the subsequent “*Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life*,” so she is by no means unacquainted with Ms. Wolf’s feminist credentials—indeed, she seems to us just the right critic for them. And again, we think you will agree that she does not disappoint, not least because her own viewpoint has undergone some radical changes only recently (she tells you that “news” herself).

By now, I need hardly remind you that we consider this journal a “permanent record” not only of the Great Abortion War, but also of the other “life issues” that have—as predicted—followed in the wake of *Roe v. Wade*. So it seems only fitting that we should record here the most impressive article we’ve yet seen on the newest threat to humankind, *cloning*. If abortion is “about” unwanted babies, cloning is about unwanted parents? Cloning conjures up notions of being your *own* parent, or virtual twin—it’s the dead end of the Slippery Slope, where any horror seems possible. Yet who would dare oppose this latest “scientific advance”?

Well, the formidable Professor Leon Kass dares, and does so with a barrage of arguments powerful enough to shell-shock even those for whom “a rosy optimism about scientific and technological progress” is, well, *religion*. But we wouldn’t dare try to tell you all about this monumental argument here, it’s something you’ve got to read to appreciate and, we predict, if you begin it, you’ll do *both*.

Our final regular article is another reprint, but a very special one. As the title recalls, the late Clare Boothe Luce was talked about as America’s “Woman of the Century”—had she written an autobiography, calling it “Been There, Done That” would have been accurate, “CBL” was the original Wonder Woman. In fact, she left no memoir, but a decade after her death she’s back in the news *via* a Queen-sized biography (over 550 pages, and this is only Volume I) by Sylvia Jukes Morris. As the *Rage for Fame* title indicates, it is not a flattering portrait, despite Mrs. Morris’ obvious awe of Mrs. Luce’s sheer *force*—or *because* of? If men fell all over themselves for *La Luce*, the emotion she most inspired in women was plain old envy? In real life she was not only a pioneer feminist but also a most effective one, yet she was no heroine to the Feminist Establishment.

The reason for that is what you will read here: Clare (as she was and remains to anyone who knew her) rejected abortion, and did it with her trade-mark “logical passion” that required *equal* force to resist. Again, we won’t try to describe it for

## INTRODUCTION

you, but as you read it (again, if you start, you *will*), just imagine how you might frame a response—that should make you laugh all the harder at imagining the effect her letter had on its “Women’s Lobby” targets?

\* \* \* \* \*

Our appendices are fewer this time (we didn’t leave ourselves much room, after ten articles!), but we think you will find them most interesting, beginning with Ruth Padawer’s report (*Appendix A*) on the new “ambivalence” about abortion. But in fact, Ms. Padawer is a good story herself: she is the intrepid reporter who “discovered”—simply by actually *asking* the doctors who performed them—that the number of “partial birth” abortions was many-thousands *more* than the “Major Media” were reporting. Thus Padawer is “responsible” for exposing the truth: most journalists are so blatantly pro-abortion that they report “Pro-choice” claims *without* checking accuracy. As Ms. Padawer later wrote, “Almost overnight I became the darling of one side and the villain of the other”—even though she herself has taken no public stand on abortion.

In *Appendix B*, Columnist Tony Snow provides another story most reporters wouldn’t think of “covering”—again, it is connected to the “partial birth” uproar, but it deserves the special attention Mr. Snow gives it, if only as a grotesque example of what “choice” has come to *mean* in medical practice.

Next, widely-read Columnist George Will (*Appendix C*) writes about a case so frightful that most Americans have read about it—the young girl who gave birth on Prom Night, tossed the baby in the rest-room trash, and returned to the dance? Will argues, witheringly, that she got the idea from the Supreme Court.

Then, beg pardon again, we come back to your servant’s “*National Review* connection”—our final items both appeared first in that esteemed journal, but we think you will agree that they also deserve a place in our own “permanent record” (which *collects* abortion-related pieces that are otherwise scattered in less-permanent periodicals?). In *Appendix D*, Mr. Michael Novak, the well-known author and critic, asks the obvious question: What are “personally opposed to abortion” politicians *really* opposing? If it sounds like the same old question, you’ll find that Mr. Novak puts a new spin on it, befitting the new “awareness” of abortion realities caused by the partial-birth abortion horror.

Finally, *Appendix E* gives you a double-header: a parting shot at Naomi Wolf from *NR*—but then it’s by “our” Ellen Wilson Fielding, who gives you another view of Ms. Wolf’s *Promiscuities*, plus her hope that nobody will take Wolf’s sexual prescriptions seriously—Isn’t that the perfect note on which to end this issue? We think so, and add our own hope that, at the very least, you will find a great deal of enjoyable stuff in this one, while we start pondering the next one.

J. P. McFadden  
Editor



## Decrying Wolf Won't Do

*William Murchison*

The Wolf who cries “Waitaminute!” is one of the odder celebrities of the oddest era in American, if not world, or for that matter cosmic, history.

Naomi Wolf’s developing speciality is moral ambiguity. On the one hand, this; on the other hand, that. Had Divine Providence given us three hands, the likelihood is that Naomi Wolf, in her present incarnation, would find ways to use them all simultaneously.

Ambiguity is a strange enough characteristic to detect in any feminist. When was one of the breed last seen exuding anything but dogmatic self-confidence? Naomi Wolf, for her part, seemed thoroughly sold on her own analysis of women’s plight in a male-dominated world.

In *The Beauty Myth*, her first literary hand grenade, tossed out in 1990, she advanced the notion that women are obsessed with their physical appearance—almost to the point of self-destructiveness. Men—the brutes!—were responsible for this sorry state of affairs. And the cosmetics industry actually connived at perpetuating the delusion of Beauty as All.

The 29-year-old author, in the interest of bulking up her case, showed herself not to be above manufacturing statistics. (E.g., “30 to 50 percent” of her own anorexic-bulimic generation were given to “puking their guts out in the latrines of the major centers of education.”)

A follow-up book, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How it Will Change the 21st Century* argued for “power feminism.” (Lord Acton, call your office.)

Why should women fear power? Ms. Wolf wanted to know. “Let’s kill off the demons of niceness,” said she . . . “Let’s be less afraid of our animal nature.” As for money, and the power it bestows—why, the more the merrier.

In the Naomi Wolf of the early ’90s, what was there for a feminist to reprobate? She was a sister! A fighter and biter!

Then heresy: Something evidently was going on in her brain. In late 1995, she scandalized the feminists with a now-famous *New Republic* article. In it she declared solemnly that “the death of a fetus is a real death.” She pronounced pro-choicers guilty of “self-delusions, fibs, and evasions.”

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**William Murchison**, our contributing editor, is a nationally-syndicated columnist at the *Dallas Morning News* and author of *Reclaiming Morality in America* (Thomas Nelson Publishers). He is also a popular speaker on a wide range of current religious and cultural issues.

Pro-choice she strangely remained, to the bafflement of readers on both sides of the life question.

This perplexing article she followed up last April with “Pro-Choice *and* Pro-Life,” published in the *New York Times*. In this portentous essay she beckons God to a “seat at the table” where discussions about “a moral framework” for legal abortion are underway. It turns out that religion, whose *bona fides* Ms. Wolf has gone over carefully, is just what we need for clearer discussion of the issue. However, religion of “the left”—certainly not of the right!

A month or two passes, and out comes her third book, *Promiscuities: The Secret Struggle for Womanhood*—a memoir, in part, about growing up raunchy in San Francisco. The English edition significantly features a nekkid woman on the cover. Wolf, in 286 pages, gratefully paws the outcomes of the sexual revolution while, consciously or unconsciously, making the revolutionaries themselves look like fruits and nuts.

A fair question is, why is so much attention paid the ambiguities of a 34-year-old author who is not yet, I believe, Willa Cather or George Eliot? Is Naomi Wolf worth it?

The answer, I have decided unambiguously, is, no/yes. No, in terms of Wolf’s literary-philosophical attainments, which at present seem unlikely to inspire graduate seminars in the late 21st century. Yes, in terms of just those qualities I mention: her ambiguities, her contradictions, her unresolved perplexities. She becomes a lens for looking at the modern struggle over human life. No doubt she never meant to become a curved piece of glass. It could be that a Higher Power resolved matters otherwise.

**W**hat is Naomi Wolf growing ambiguous about, either openly or by implication? Abortion, yes, of course; but not *just* abortion, a doctrine that could have grown only in a particular soil, with the help of particular fertilization and cultivation techniques. The constitutional right to squelch the consequences of sex springs from, and depends on, the concept of sexual expression itself as a right. No such right was recognized by the broader culture when Naomi Wolf was born in San Francisco, in 1962. Eleven years later, with *Roe v. Wade*, the sexual revolution had brought that right to full flower. It blooms still.

The revolution, as the author reports in “Promiscuities,” supplied her formative life-experiences, not to say her motive power as a thinker and analyst. How truly exquisite the experience ought to have been in the City by the Bay, with the high hills like mountain peaks of desire and the fog like a pair—two pairs, three!—of enfolding arms, and the cold, dark wa-

ters of the bay itself always there to freeze, to shrink, to drown, historic inhibitions.

Particularly was all this so when your house peered down into the cauldron of the Haight-Ashbury district, boiling with revolution and soon to become the international capital of Pure Release. Naomi Wolf lived in such a house. She led such a life as San Francisco in the '60s and '70s held up for universal acclaim.

She had practically no other choice. Her parents, to apply a conventional term to a mother and father who hated conventions of all sorts, left Naomi to find her own path through the revolutionary debris. Mom was an anthropologist and psychotherapist who hung out with lesbians, Dad a school teacher fascinated by vampires and the occult. (He has a new book of his own out: *Dracula: The Connoisseur's Guide*. Whether book stores will pair it with *Promiscuities* is a question almost too grim to ask.) "The natural world," says Naomi, "was held up as a place where anything goes. If it was natural, it was OK."

And the natural result of doing what comes naturally—what is that? We see it in the 34-year-old Naomi: continued acceptance and affirmation, diluted by a sense of something not quite right, something gone off the tracks in the darkness. The social revolutionary (who is married today, with a child) turns out to have a conscience. As consciences will, this one whispers to her.

Abortion is the central consequence of the sexual revolution.

Naomi Wolf's post-revolutionary reflections on it indicate the toll the struggle has taken. Her *New York Times* piece is poignant. In it she yearns for "a moral framework around legal abortion." Pro-choicers who would explain away the gruesome details of abortion resort to "heartless medicalese." The American abortion rate is "shamefully high." The policies that sustain this rate should be called "crimes against women." Abortion itself may be a "necessary evil." However, on "issues like abortion and assisted suicide, the old Marxist-Freudian, secular-materialist left has run out of both ideas and authority." The proper defense of abortion rests with the religious left, as it tries to explain God's will. As is plain from the headline—"Pro-Choice *and* Pro-Life"—Naomi wishes to have it both ways. How modern! Morality *and* feminism. Life *and* choice—even choices that, to put it mildly, detract from life.

Pro-life folk can and should find much to object to in the Wolfian approach, but that such an approach appears in such a quarter and commands such interest—here is the wonder. Dr. Johnson's observation about the

woman preacher and the hind-legs-walking dog comes irresistibly to mind: “It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.”

The reconstruction of morality is the task to which Naomi Wolf has set herself. This should not escape notice. She yearns to judge; to measure human behavior, in one sphere at least, by specific calipers and yardsticks. How long has it been since society at large exercised that privilege? Long enough that the judging faculty has grown rusty. We have to accord Naomi Wolf a little latitude to squeak. Come to think of it, her judging faculty, given the circumstances of her non-upbringing, never had a chance to roll off the assembly line, far less to rust. Her discovery of the need for such a faculty might be considered an instance of—grace? Stranger things have happened.

The remedies to which Naomi Wolf points are less important than the fact of her extended index finger. *Of course*, she’s wrong about “cheap and easily accessible contraception” as “the best antidote” to today’s abortion rate! Contraception already is cheap and accessible, not to mention tirelessly, and tiresomely, publicized. The Cult of the Holy Condom flourishes from coast to coast, in schools, in churches, and wherever the ubiquitous educator, television, bids us sit down and listen. There can be no one in the United States, certainly no one with two hormones working in tandem, who is unaware of the protective qualities of a good, cheap condom. This is not the problem.

The problem—where the rubber, so to speak, meets the road—is the reluctance so many feel regarding these inhibitory devices. The condom is awkward! It de-passionizes passion! And what if you just plain forget to purchase or bring or use it? Nor is the condom by any means a foolproof device. Plenty of people get pregnant despite using it. How does Ms. Wolf resolve this perplexity?

**B**ut there is an even larger problem—a moral problem, I might add, as we’re on the subject of moral reconstruction. The problem is that condoms at best are substitutes for the exercise of the moral faculty. Where the moral faculty actually works—where sex bears a relationship to intended procreation or the expression of married love—pregnancy-prevention isn’t the issue at hand. This is to speak generally, of course. Unintended pregnancies are almost as common in the human experience as bad breath. But, concerning these, morality speaks additional words, having to do with respect for, and nurture of, that which love and biology have called into being.

If you start hammering together such a moral framework as Naomi Wolf

has in mind, you find that framework not so much supporting choice as guiding, channeling, directing it. You discover, standing within the framework, the existence of compulsions that do not answer directly to the stirrings of blood. They seem to come from within, yes—but, mysteriously, also from without.

Naomi Wolf recognizes, I think, the legitimacy of these compulsions, and their irresistible power; they concern the doing of things that are on their own terms “right,” and, equally, abstention from things that are on their own terms “wrong.”

Two very quaint terms, right and wrong, hardly in fashion during Naomi’s youth, and for that reason less understandable to her than to the average Southern Baptist. This is why she wants the building of the moral framework entrusted to “the religious left,” with which she feels instinctively more comfortable than she does with “the religious right.” The “religious left” seems somehow more humane, more pardoning and affirming, hence in general easier to do business with. The religious right might condemn. The religious left is likelier just to admonish, like the gently reproachful mother Naomi Wolf never had. The religious left might send us to bed without TV. The religious right seems fully capable of chucking us into the fire that never shall be quenched.

The “religious right” owes it to itself—and to God, no doubt—to meditate on suppositions like these: to wonder if the evangelical balance between love and judgment is always maintained with care. Yet Ms. Wolf has some wondering of her own to do. She has not gone far in this direction; but considering how far she has come from where she started, no one should give up on her going the whole way. At the same time, her musings about the religious left get her only so far. The religious left has a nice, sweet face indeed. The trouble with that face, often enough, is its vacuous expression.

The religious left is almost the last human enterprise likely to be interested in the erection of a moral framework. The very word “framework,” as we observe, implies definiteness in the way of doing things. Definiteness does not go down well with the religious left. Definiteness seems to foreclose exploration and self-discovery, two very big concepts over on the religious left.

The long suit of the religious left—Roman Catholic, Jewish, Episcopalian, whatever—is ambiguity and imprecision, especially where moral teaching is concerned. Bishop Spong, Father Greeley, Bishop Gumbleton, meet Ms. Wolf. How such an alliance serves the purpose of erecting and maintaining a

moral framework, only Ms. Wolf can say. She seems not to have given the matter a lot of thought.

Perhaps she merely wants to listen, not recommend. "We should call on the ministers, priests, and rabbis of the religious left to explain their support of abortion rights in light of what they understand to be God's will," she says. The trouble is, they do this now. The wont of the religious left—with all respect to it—is to baptize and sanctify whatever the culture seems most to want. Provided the culture doesn't want nuclear war, capital punishment, meaningful welfare reform, or a prompt end to affirmative action.

The religious left has only marginal trouble with abortion, which it generally sees as a woman's way of affirming her personhood. Yes, a sad way! A wasteful way! The religious left wrings its hands eloquently. Asking it to come out against abortion, nonetheless, is like asking Dr. David Kessler to recommend a good Cuban cigar.

**I**t is difficult, in short, to see what difference Ms. Wolf's proposed alliance would make. What would change, were the religious left to buy into her enterprise? Would the number of abortions diminish? Doubtful. Would the number of pious conferences and position papers multiply? Definitely. Ms. Wolf's newly active conscience might cease to hector her. Then again it might not. Some sweet summer night, as she dozed over the latest left-religious position paper—with its re-chewing of proposals for balancing a woman's and a fetus' respective rights—a clear, insistent Voice might speak in her ear. What might such a Voice say?

That, to begin with, moral reconstruction *is* necessary—but that not all projects of reconstruction are necessarily moral.

Oh? the dozing Ms. Wolf might then say. Tell me more. The Voice might continue:

A moral framework is not reared for the convenience of debating societies—although such groups may use it to assert as unproved the notion that higher goods and lower goods are knowable and provable. A moral framework, by virtue of its angles and contours, its pillars and posts, defines the terrain on which it stands. A moral framework imposes—though "imposes" sounds more despotic than it should—regularity upon life; the irregular, hence the untrustworthy, is what you find outside the framework.

Is one to hate the people who purposely keep themselves outside the framework?—the mothers, for instance, who aborted their babies, the doctors who performed those abortions? Lordy, no!, the Voice would reply.

In fact the constant objective of those who live within the framework is gently, persuasively, to draw in all those presently outside—for their benefit, not their punishment.

Where is the hated “religious right” in all this? the dozing Ms. Wolf might wonder.

A moral framework is not a scaffold for hanging heretics, the Voice might reply. A moral framework exists for the proper identification of behaviors that undermine and impeach hopes for true human happiness.

A shake of Ms. Wolf’s slumbrous head. And who determines “true human happiness” if not the humans seeking it? Uttering a single word, the Voice lapses into silence. The word is “God.”

And now one can see the dozing body sitting bolt upright. God! The God of the religious left? Well . . . yes. In part. But only in part. The God who made leftists and rightists and in-betweenists and nothingists, not to mention just plain, devout worshippers of His truth, is the God in question; the lord of life itself, whose name blazes from the moral blueprints.

In Naomi Wolf’s San Francisco, such a God couldn’t reach first base. The sexual revolution ended up ousting Him from the game. There was no place for Him, with His rules and doctrines and claims to the exercise of Authority. In this rejection Naomi Wolf gladly joined, only to find herself, in due course, becoming more and more and more . . . ambiguous; more worried about where her own premises were leading her and those she cared about.

It would be unkind and perhaps even ungrateful to expect the Naomi Wolf of 1997 to understand that a moral framework is no framework at all unless built according to divine specifications. And to understand further that “specifications” means “specifications”: a catalog of do’s and don’ts that, by *seeming* to circumscribe choice, raises choice to a higher, purer level. Not *whether* to serve God, but *which* service to perform for Him at a given moment? How to praise Him for the gift of life? How best to honor the life He bestows? Such are the choices the moral framework makes evident.

Naomi Wolf is right to this degree: Life is a highly theological proposition. Shut out God from His own creation, and you may find yourself, like Papa Wolf, consorting with vampires, or, like Mama Wolf, with lesbians. The grown-up Naomi, divorced from this foul and debilitating environment, is wrong on much—but wrong with a becoming rightness that no student of her early works would have had any cause to expect.

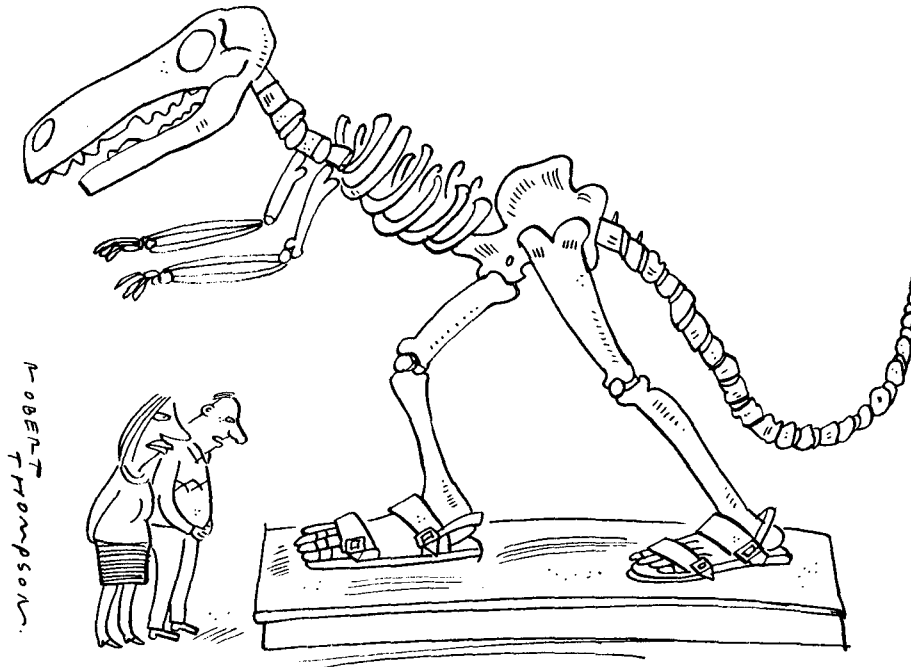
The more severe sort of intellectual Wolf-trapper might ask himself as

WILLIAM MURCHISON

he sets the snare: What would I be like, had *I* grown up in an environment like Naomi's? Would I have come so relatively far, so comparatively early? Maybe; and, again, maybe not.

I have said that no age in American history exceeds this one for oddity. For madness may be more like it. The disjointed times press down on every inmate of the late 20th century. Among those who yearn for restoration of the moral and theological order, a little generosity of spirit never comes amiss. Nor does a frank willingness to let bygones be bygones and even to discover allies in unlikely corners: wholehearted allies if you can get them; partial, occasional, ad hoc ones if not.

Naomi Wolf, feminist liberal, inevitably seems to some an unlikely saddle companion in the great crusade for human life. But there she rides anyway, astride a spavined old plug that, when the worst has been said and thought—and it has been!—seems to be going our way.



*'This one was definitely a vegetarian'*

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14/SUMMER 1997



# Crying “Choice” Too Often

*Ellen Wilson Fielding*

When I was in my teens, I managed to avoid succumbing to the peculiarly adolescent charm of Ayn Rand’s rationalized selfishness. Teenagers are as a group highly self-absorbed, but I understood theoretically at least that it was not kosher to raise egotism to a virtue.

However, I did gravitate toward the more individualistic, libertarian end of political opinion. This was natural enough, since teenagers are engaged in prying themselves from the families they perceive themselves to be emerging from. My adolescence began at the very end of the 60s, amid TV and *Life*-magazine images of communes, Woodstocks, love-ins, demonstrations and other high-density efforts to erode the boundary lines between individuals.

Yet all these efforts had much in common with the inchoate yearnings of my friends and me for space, for privacy, for a room of one’s own. The mud-drenched Woodstock attendee, however eager to experience togetherness with thousands of strangers amid palls of marijuana smoke, was choosing another way of defining himself, separate from family background and expectations. He wished to merge with peers, who could exercise no authority over him, rather than accommodate himself to a community with superiors and subordinates—people to answer to, people who might depend on you.

The illusion of individuality found its most congenial home on college campuses, where populations of healthy, financially subsidized young people could exercise their God-given freedom to take enormous risks and make major errors in judgment in a temporary, and therefore relatively anonymous community.

A friend of mine once noted the extremely high mortality rate of marriages contracted in graduate school, attributing many of the failures to the unreal isolation from hometowns and backgrounds of the couples, who trusted to a common field of study and similar tastes in music and movies to glue them together for a lifetime. Emerging from the isolation into a world of jobs, families, choices about where to live and how to furnish it, ethnic identifications, city/suburban/rural proclivities and the like, the two

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halves of what once had seemed a couple began to strain apart.

If it is easiest to believe we are mostly self-determined atoms in our teens and early 20s (when our first act on setting up housekeeping is likely to be buying a detergent or toothpaste different from that we grew up with), experiences in the succeeding decade seem designed to reacquaint us with Aristotle, who noted that man is a social animal. We come to terms with the fact that we grew up in such and such a place, in such and such a way, owing much of our tastes and talents to the people and experiences that—yes—largely shaped us. Johann Sebastian Bach was not my father, and it shows. Mary Cassatt was not my mother. Many traits of temperament and disposition can be easily traced to family; many of the likes and dislikes that make me familiar with myself have forty-year-old pedigrees leading back to the nursery. Religious beliefs, and also the forms in which I express them, are clearly and strongly influenced by family and Church, no matter how much my adulthood of dealing with God has made them doubly my own.

This web of genetic and environmental connections—Nature and Nurture—would make any claim to being self-made fatuous. I am not self-made as an individual personality any more than I am as an ensouled creature. Yet the interconnections and indebtedness to other people does not just rest in the past. We are forever interconnected, in ways that either propel us forward or retard our development (and of course, we also both help and hinder those connected to us).

This is something that galls not only rugged individualists and followers of Ayn Rand, but also feminists, for all their talk of larger entities like the Sisterhood and for all their preoccupation with social concerns—like pornography, rape, and sexual harassment.

One of the tipoffs is the feminist attachment to the word “choice,” especially in situations where these choices may be contingent on the claims and requirements of other people. Take the abortion choice, which NOW and NARAL insist must belong solely to the pregnant woman. This attitude owes much to a perception of human beings as alone, solitary, ultimately beholden to no one, ideally dependent on no one. In reality the human species does not self-impregnate, and grandparents (and aunts and uncles and siblings) often take an interest in their near relations. Barring the tentative efforts of a few states, as the law now stands, parents and spouses have no legal input into the pregnant woman’s choice. And that is how NOW and NARAL like it. A father who would be legally bound to contribute to the unborn child’s upbringing is no part of the public legal decision to abort.

But the unreality of the feminist approach to abortion goes further. For whatever the legalities may be, the father is often deeply influential in the decision to abort or to protect. There are women who are prevailed upon to keep a child a father wants. But we all know women whose partners strongly and successfully urged them to go against instincts, inclinations and beliefs, and choose the other way—for abortion. We know of “potential” grandparents who used their authority and affection to urge a pregnant daughter to choose life, but there are many parents of teenagers and college students who disinherit this grandchild of his right to life. In other words, whether or not there is an unencumbered legal right to choose abortion, there is and, humanly speaking, can be, no unencumbered social right to choose. The question of abortion must be decided on other grounds than a mythical autonomy which denies the importance of this decision for other people.

For, despite all the talk about it being a “private choice,” abortion creates ripples, even large waves, for family, friends and society. But of course, if we recognize that abortion extinguishes the life of a human being, it has its heaviest effect on the thwarted unborn child.

A family described in a recent column by Tony Snow demonstrates the flip side of this chimera of pure choice. A pregnant woman’s baby was diagnosed as missing half or more of her brain. Doctors predicted a gruesome future, and urged the mother to undergo what we now all know as a partial birth abortion. When she and her husband refused, her doctor declined to treat her further, and the parents bounced from doctor’s office to doctor’s office before locating one willing to deliver the baby. After the birth it took Herculean efforts—and that grace we call luck—to find a way to nourish the baby girl and—contrary to all the doomsayers, after heart-breaking setbacks—cause her to thrive. “Choice? They didn’t give me a choice!” this mother now says, recalling that the medical people almost succeeded in denying her a choice. For better or worse, none of us can achieve autonomy. We are lifted up or bowed down by everyone we know, and by a great many people we will never meet.

Feminist author (of *The Beauty Myth*) Naomi Wolf created a mini-sensation a year ago with her article on abortion, “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” in which she admitted that, though “choice” is necessary for women’s autonomy, abortion nonetheless does end a human life. She suggested that we devise mourning rituals to cope with our sense of guilt. As Wolf’s feminist credentials are impeccable, she has been eyed as a potential inventor of a feminism with a human face.

She has now published a new book, *Promiscuities*, which celebrates the sexual coming of age of her generation in the 70s and attempts to midwife a happier, more satisfying sexual coming of age for her young daughter's generation. And, as a "feminist Mom," she has written recently in the *New York Daily News* (in a column coinciding with Mother's Day) about how tired and harried contemporary women are, juggling families and careers. Her recommended solutions target government, employers and husbands.

One of the problems with this unfortunately whiny column is, again, this feminist ideal of the solitary choice. Wolf tries to include all working mothers in her purview ("Most women work outside the home because they have to"). But this is clearly yet another contribution from a career woman meant for better things than entertaining toddlers: "But even those who merely crave the balance of work and family should not be forced to pay for it with this bone-numbing fatigue." The question that occurs to me, about the women she describes who choose to work for extra fulfillment or variety or stimulation is: Who is forcing them to do what? Why is a guilt trip being foisted on an employer or the government so that they may be induced to address Naomi Wolf's problem, whether by helping her out with her family responsibilities, or cutting back on her worktime or workload (without career penalties), or giving her husband some slack so he can pitch in more at home?

This may sound callous. I don't mean it to be. I know and sympathize with the conflicts and tugs of war experienced by many of the women Wolf is talking about. But there is something just a little too familiar about the tone of this column, just a little too reminiscent of the mother with the martyr complex who turns up in jokes and family teasing—"No, you go out and have a good time. I'll stay home and mend some socks." That kind of thing.

Even with the excuse of a demoralizing holiday like Mother's Day, Wolf's piece is much too nobly sorry for itself. "We forget that good maternal love requires amounts of energy that are nothing short of heroic." Even if, in your heart of hearts, you think that, you need someone else, preferably male, to say it—to pull it off. Maybe an Irish tenor.

There are important psychological conflicts that tax the "natural resources" of contemporary men and women, but they are not directly related to too few hours and too many things to do. If that were so, our own mothers and grandmothers and great-grandmothers, with their Olympian standards of cleanliness and their pre-permanent press ironing loads, their food-from-scratch (and so much of it!) and big families, their gardens,

knitting, crocheting, mending, etc., etc., would still have beat us hollow. Reread *The Little House on the Prairie*, or *I Remember Mama*, to find out what work—and weariness—really are.

And the men—the long days, the double shifts, the second or third job (my own father, a firefighter, finally dropped down to “only” one job after the last of us graduated from college), enlivened by hours at home repairing things or doing all those home improvements that most of us now collect estimates for. Those men made real heroic sacrifices for things that mattered deeply to them, like the education that would buy their children a better chance.

They knew what they were doing and why, and they were convinced that they were pursuing the right course. However wearying the daily grind, that kind of confidence in what you are doing and where you are going can dispel a great deal of psychic exhaustion.

It is doubts about what we should be doing and where we should be heading, or guilt about putting personal preferences too often before duty, that causes much of the peculiarly modern exhaustion Wolf diagnoses, but fails properly to prescribe for. All kinds of women today, whether married or single, having children or considering it, staying home with the kids or combining a job with parenthood, suffer from the self-doubting and self-questioning that are the legacy of a collapsed consensus on how our lives should be lived. Romantic artists and the bohemians of more than a century ago, railing against conventions they had no use for, ultimately triumphed, but without addressing the needs of the mass of people whose lives must be lived conventionally.

Let us for the moment sidestep the question of which set of conventions are best to live under and look at the difficulties of living between and among competing conventions, implicitly or explicitly called upon to defend your choices to others and to yourself.

After my fourth child was born, I shared a hospital room with a first-time mother anxious to do the right things for her baby but not sure what those were. One nurse told her that for successful breastfeeding she should inform the nursery not to offer any supplemental feedings, including sugar water. But then another nurse told her that she *should* let the baby have the sugar water. This poor tired new mother tormented herself with indecision. I told her, “Look, I have my own opinion, but what you don’t need is another opinion. This is honestly not a crucial decision. Healthy babies have emerged from both methods. Just decide one way or the other and then relax about it.”

But not everything can be decided without the legitimate strain of wondering whether a great mistake is being made. Many childrearing decisions are based on little more than the temperament and tastes of the parents or children. But some have important moral or religious ramifications, and some may place the child in physical or emotional jeopardy, even if the parent never intended it.

With the stakes so high, and the cultural variations so great, and the break in continuity with the past so disorienting, anxieties and uncertainties are inevitable. Naomi Wolf views with nostalgia the World War II generation of mothers, but she takes the wrong lesson from their sense of direction.

She points to the day-care centers set up by the government during the war and argues that the powers that be were willing to recognize and accommodate the needs of mothers only in a national emergency, when the nation needed them at work. But the disappearance of these day-care centers in the post-war Baby Boom era does not prove that mothers or their children were being neglected. For most mothers of small children wished, if possible, to stay home with them and care for them. The war was not for these women an opportunity to sneak freedom from childrearing, but a great national ordeal calling on them to make sacrifices of their dreams and plans.

You might as well say that because some wartime marriages were rocky, and some reunions unstable, the war presented a wonderful opportunity for married women not to live with their husbands. Betty Friedan notwithstanding, the postwar period and its Baby Boom marked the opportunity, after the scrimping Depression years and the austerities of war, to experience prosperity enough for many women to be what we now call the primary caregiver for their children. This was a self-evident good, to be envied by those whose incomes did not allow for it, and voluntarily bypassed only by a small sub-group of talent-driven or career-thinking women.

But with the sexual revolution and the contraceptive era, that verity was called into question, along with many others. In keeping with the feminist paradigm of autonomous choices, every mother is supposed to be free to decide whether to work outside the home or to be keeper of the hearth, yet once again that "choice" seems a cruel joke to many and a quandary to others.

Most women who have young children and work significant hours outside the home say they do not have a choice. A scattering of recent articles has questioned how much working mothers really want to be at home as opposed to merely feeling that they *should* want to. They point to the

satisfactions of spending more time around adults and the significant gratification of receiving the approval for one's work represented by a paycheck. (A parent of young children has no comparable "objective" mark of approval, for the smiles and hugs of one moment are countered by the tears and tantrums of the next—and in neither case can the child's judgment necessarily be relied upon!)

But the "choice" of working is much more complicated, for it involves the weighting of priorities, and the mother does not, whatever feminists wish or think, have the only voice in this. There are mothers who say they work from necessity but whose families could really get by on less. There are mothers who by contemporary standards "need" to work fulltime, but value the parent-at-home mode of childrearing enough to make what would constitute severe economizing by other people's standards. There are women who need the income but work primarily for other satisfactions. There are women who don't now need the money, but who, after a past experience with a husband's job loss, disability, or desertion, grasp the security of that second income buffering their families against fate. And husbands and relatives lobby for their own views.

Ideas on how best to be a parent have suffered the same upheaval as ideas about contraception or divorce. In theory, all of these are supposed to give women greater choices, but in practice they tend to pull out from under women the foundation on which they need to stand to choose a course with the conviction that they are doing the right thing. It is too much to ask each person to make or remake in himself a culture and, in fact, that is not what people do even in times of moral cacophony like these.

Instead, women (like men) cobble together different and sometimes inconsistent combinations of the way they have been brought up, the way their friends and spouses have been brought up, the current wisdom of the experts, regional customs, and how tired or fed up, or rebellious or conformist, they feel at a given period in their lives.

Is this "choice"? Is this determinism, whether genetic or cultural or some combination of the two? Does it really matter what you call it, and should enlarging "choice," when it is defined this haphazardly, really possess so much of our time and attention?

Naomi Wolf leaps quickly to the idea of helping women exercise the choice to combine children and a career with less guilt and fatigue. But I think she and all of us moderns get the nature and meaning of choosing wrong. They imagine it goes like this: You achieve happiness by deciding what you would like and getting it, and by deciding what you don't want

and ridding yourself of that. If you want a baby and a job you get those, and if they do not work out the way you thought, then that is because you have not received the help you need, or the breaks or promotions you hoped for, or the marriage partner of your dreams. Otherwise, barring accidents and acts of God, you would be happy.

But happiness is not like that—it cannot be stalked by one's choices that way. The generation that came of age in the 60s, who believed they were free to choose to be happy, even in extravagant and once-forbidden ways, have found themselves more unhappy, guilt-stricken, conflicted and anxious than their parents.

For choice in liberal and feminist terms always ends up meaning succumbing to urges, inclinations or itches—to what earlier Christian societies have considered the kinds of things that hamper or becloud our ability to choose wisely for our own good and ultimate happiness. Was Lt. Kelly Flinn, the adulterous Air Force pilot, making a choice conducive to her happiness by conducting an affair with a married man? Were Air Force regulations unduly interfering with her right to happiness? Or are we to say, as Lucifer did, that the right to choose is all-important—better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven?

**W**hat is the point of this overwhelming emphasis on freedom detached from its consequences—are we seeking better, happier people, or mere autonomy for its own sake? Is Naomi Wolf trying to help women and their children find the best way to live and grow? Or is she simply assuming that because these women choose such and such a path, their choice must, barring criminal abuse and neglect, be the correct one, and thus deserve whatever support is necessary?

Christian liberty, so figures as diverse as Martin Luther and John Paul II have said, is the liberty to do what is right. All kinds of errors, mistakes and outright sins, mortal and venial, are permitted us legally, but that doesn't mean we should ignore the very sensible lesson that Luther, John Paul II and others are teaching: seek first to know what is the right thing to do (not always an easy task in itself, but much harder if you are not looking for it), and then trust that your happiness can and will only come from pursuing what you know to be right.

Reverse, therefore, the modern order of trying to follow the uncertain guidance of feelings, because that road will lead to the conflicts and competing claims—the disillusionments and personal betrayals, the self-preoccupations and guilty consciences—that we are all familiar with. Naturally, take feelings into account in choosing when and whom to marry, for



example. But afterwards, you must subordinate the vagaries of feelings to that vow, that permanent union.

Of course, you should love your children with a heart as well as a head. But once they are there, your child-rearing choices must be based on more than splitting the difference between what you want (more space, more privacy, adult companionship, fulfilling work) and what your child wants (you). You will have to direct the spotlight not so much on what you want as on what your family *requires* (since all their “wants” cannot possibly be fulfilled either).

That doesn't make all of life's choices clear-cut and obvious, but it does cut away some of the confusion by reducing, for example, the degree to which you and your children, or you and your spouse, act like siblings squabbling over who gets the most privileges. It is much easier to live with irksome duties and delayed gratifications if you accept that they are necessary by-products of duties undertaken and vows made. It is hard, on the other hand, to juggle competing pleasures neither of which, society tells you, you should have to deny yourself. The kind of self-denial that tells you that you must postpone certain pleasures and say goodbye to other ones—that you may well have to moderate certain ambitions because of obligations entered into or choices made—this kind of self-denial may be healthier and more satisfying than being pulled apart by a career and a baby, both freely chosen, and in bewildered guilt and frustration, lashing out at a boss or a husband or the government for depriving you of happiness.

Naomi Wolf demonstrates a stunning insensitivity by calling up the wives and mothers of the World War II era, forced by the needs of wartime and the absence of family members to rely upon daycare, as witnesses on her behalf. I don't know how many mothers at that time would have agreed that the turns their lives took in the early 40s had much to do with choices and self-fulfillment. Words like duty, and “doing what you have to do” probably sprang more easily to mind. Much in their daily life was hard, despite the brand new daycare centers with their hot evening meals so coveted by Naomi Wolf. We might as well recall the temporary exile of London wartime children to rural counties and America as a model for contemporary childrearing policies.

Those World War II wives and mothers had a greater confidence that they were making the right choices because their yardstick was not a shifting and imprecise measure of happiness or personal development, but rather a judgment of how well they were meeting their responsibilities.

ELLEN WILSON FIELDING

In sharp contrast, Naomi Wolf concentrates on how tired she and other American mothers are feeling, and how little other people are doing about it. Which attitude is more grown-up, more realistic, more "heroic," to use Wolf's term? Which set of women deserve the larger Mother's Day bouquet? The choice is easy.



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## A Downfall by Upbringing?

Lynette Burrows

One could almost think, from Naomi Wolf's final chapter in her new book *Promiscuities*, that she was making a case for all-girl schools. She certainly pleads for girls to be offered the chance to experience a male-free environment during early adolescence, which is characterised by "rigour, separation from males and from the daily environment, and the exchange of privileged information. It is important . . . for grown women outside of the family to be part of this initiation."

Unfortunately, however, this book is not a simple plea to think again about how girls are educated in either a general or a specific sense, and the quote is curiously unconnected to what has gone before. As might be inferred from the title, the book examines the promiscuities of her own early life and those of her friends—fortuitously, always much worse than her own. The book has a suggestive but meaningless nude on the cover to boost sales and, no doubt for the same reason, the contents cover a fairly broad spectrum of safe, unsafe and deviant sexual activity.

The tone of the book is critical, and yet the object of the criticism is strangely difficult to pin down. As far as the reported experience of her friends is concerned, the ones who are early experimenters with sex come to grief, or at least, don't *thrive*, but we do not know if we are being asked to judge their behaviour or not. Of a girl who appeared to be caught on a nightly treadmill of sexually servicing various young men, we are offered the comment "But I could see that something was getting worn down in her. By the time we started high school, there were always dark circles under her eyes."

One wonders whether this patient regret is on account of the disfiguring dark circles, or to something else, unspecified. This kind of gnomic assessment is repeated several times in cases where the girls either got pregnant when they knew all about contraception, or submitted to sexual intercourse when they didn't really want to, or engaged in sexual activity because it was expected of them—and they were high on drugs.

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Lynette Burrows is an English journalist and broadcaster (her book *Good Children* was described by the London *Financial Times* as "so old-fashioned it is positively radical"), and a frequent contributor to this journal. Naomi Wolf's *Promiscuities* was available in Britain (from Chatto & Windus, with the subtitle "A Secret History of Female Desire") before it was published in the U.S., and was widely reviewed in the British press. The U.S. edition (from Random House) bears the subtitle "The Secret Struggle for Womanhood," without a nude on the dustjacket.

The anonymous testimony of her friends are un-relieved horror stories really—except the homosexual ones, of course, which are, as we all know, trouble free and quite perfect. And yet at the same time, it appears, the author wants to have it both ways. “Where do we get the modern sense that our past must be immaculate, that our ‘promiscuity,’ our being in any way ‘out of control,’ can lead us, if discovered, into symbolic or actual annihilation?” To most readers, the answer would be perfectly plain from her text, even if real life had spared them actual experience of it.

She goes on to say: “It is neither natural nor inevitable that women’s lust should be punished. Our own culture may have learned, with a struggle, to make that association.” I quote this last sentence, with which she concludes the paragraph, as an illustration of the difficulty one has in following her train of thought.

What is the association to which she is referring? “Natural and inevitable,” or “lust and punishment”? And why is the word “struggle” used in what seems to be a positive sense, if she is saying that punishing lust is a bad thing? It is incomprehensible and so, on closer examination, is much of her argument. The conclusion appears to advocate an only slightly altered variation of the meaningless sexual activity which she has spent the bulk of the book bemoaning.

Returning to the passage in the final chapter where she speaks of rigorously educating adolescent girls in isolation from boys, we find her suggesting that the curriculum should include “self-defence, contraception, sexual pleasure and parenting.” Now there’s a list to make Miss Jean Brodie blanche—but why are three out of the four to do with “reproductive health” and the fourth to do with self-defence? Is there a connection at least in the mind of the author?

The answer is yes, and this seems to be the key to her whole philosophy. She believes that women have some sort of a right to sexual adventurism, and the fact that this then puts them at all sorts of risk—including to their physical safety—is really her main preoccupation.

It is difficult for someone who is not American to know how typical Ms. Wolf’s upbringing and educational experience were. To me at least it is utterly alien; a thing both so ghastly and so disastrous that one can only wonder that she survived it. Jewish and middle-class, she describes an upbringing that is governed entirely by a mass culture that must be the lowest ever to have defaced an otherwise advanced civilization.

In fact, she does acknowledge a great deal of this, and even says that her generation must begin to make restitution to children for giving them

a culture that has been “corrupted beyond the imagining” of those who grew up before them in the 1960s and 70s.

Even so, to have a corrupt culture is one thing, but to have an adult population comprising citizens who were also parents, who did so little to protect their children from such a culture is quite phenomenal. In her own case, it is particularly striking that in her book, her own parents have added not one line of intelligent thought, no positive advice, no admirable example, no dire warnings, no practical wisdom, nor coherent philosophy, to her social, emotional, or intellectual education. They are the black hole at the centre of her existence, and it is the absence of their moral and intellectual force that makes her story so bizarre and, ultimately, so sad.

Evidently when it came to growing up in San Francisco in the 60s and 70s, children were on their own. There can surely never have been an environment which was as overt, crude and downright obsessive as the sexual culture of that time and place, as described by Ms. Wolf. The growing child was treated to eye level pornographic images when she was four years old, sexual talismans sold alongside packets of cornflakes; the sexual aura surrounding adult group nudity; mind-altering drugs and the abnormal behaviour it facilitated, even the soap the children used—if that is what “Love’s Baby Soft” is—was sexualized, “Because Innocence is Sexy.”

The onslaught of this debased, commercial hedonism, based upon the sexual impulse, was powerful medicine. It certainly affected her parents, who were, presumably, mature people: it caused them, and most others of their generation, to go off the rails of responsible parenting. What chance did children have against it?

The only thing Naomi remembers her parents insisting upon was that she stop seeing a boy who bullied and hit her when she was a teenager. Even then, they did not confront the uncouth yob with concerted family fury and action; their disapproval was as boneless and unimpressive as everything else about them. They did insist that she clean her room before she had any subsequent boyfriend in to stay the night, but that was about the length and breadth of their care and control. The child observed their progress into hippydom, as she said, “growing brighter and brighter, furrer and furrer” as the years went by—rather like the nether regions of an orangutan.

Because of this moral vacuum at the centre of her life, poor Ms. Wolf has had no experience of the usual role models which educate girls. For her, the question “Who is the boss in your home?” would not evoke the usual, rueful, admiring admission that most of the rules which govern

domestic life are mother-made, because her mother, and her friends' mothers, *had* no such authority. None of them had a strong line in maternal prejudice—like my mother against Barbie Dolls (a prejudice which Ms. Wolf now shares)—that would not only have prevented their modelling themselves upon her as children, but also would have taught them that being a woman means thinking for yourself and acting on it, regardless of what the media (or anyone *else*) may say.

**G**oodness, I remember my mother still berating my boyfriends for careless language, dropping their *aiches* or smoking without permission when I was at University! “Lucretia” my friends called her, and we used to laugh about it—but it didn’t stop them coming round. My own daughters, known to their brothers as the “Oberfuhren,” are even worse. No one impugns their dignity without a severe drubbing, and the advantage in “sexual harassment” is decidedly on their side. It is the absence of an automatic, ancestral assumption of moral authority that all the girls described in *Promiscuities* lack. It must be the reason that Ms. Wolf dreams so much about other women, usually in outlandish cultures, who seem to have it to an alluring degree—at least in those things she thinks are of overriding importance, which are usually sexual.

Her uncritical admiration of the “prostitute priestesses” of Babylon, for instance, does not include either speculation as to how they were recruited, or to what extent it was voluntary; nor does she inform the reader that this culture also included the practice of human sacrifice, particularly of children. It is the prostitutes’ *status* which enchants Ms. Wolf, and the fact that their existence most probably owed far more to the fact that they were prostitutes than to any token priestly function is a beady-eyed cynicism she cannot allow herself.

This preoccupation with “empowering women” by means of their sexuality is surely a by-product of having a mother who never seemed able to assert herself to any other end. As an argument, it is about as convincing as trying to claim that buying a drink in a pub “empowers” you. I suppose it does in a very minor way, but it is a meaningless thing with which to try to establish self-respect. After all, it doesn’t take much to get a man to have sexual intercourse with a girl, and the attempt to make it an achievement in itself is really rather pathetic. That the risk is still greater to the woman than to the man is a fact of biology which Ms. Wolf is never tired of pointing out—whilst insisting the risk is a social construct that owes nothing to a reality inherent in nature and so must be contested. She offers no solution to the fact that a woman can be quite easily rendered barren by

promiscuity, for example, and that this must have been of great concern to previous, and even present cultures.

However, there is another misconception which is directly attributable to a poor education and a poverty-stricken culture, and that is her assumption that women have never had the opportunity to choose anything. If she is to be believed, it is the view of American feminists that women were hapless victims of men until the 20th century, when something finally woke them up. One wonders what it could have been that had this startling effect, and one mourns, at least in theory, that women are such late-developers, that they can never be considered the equal of men.

Very many examples in *Promiscuities* allude to a supposed oppression of women, but the author seems unaware how many of her chosen examples indicate the opposite of her claim. That marriages were arranged for dynastic reasons is incontrovertible, for example—but that there were both a woman *and a man* involved thereby in a possibly loveless match does not seem to occur to her. Nor that at least two other women, the mothers of both parties, would have played a significant and often well-documented part in the arrangement also escapes Ms. Wolf.

Incidentally, she also does not ponder the fact that an undoubtedly stronger, tyrannical male sex—which is how she sees them—actually does not need to marry women at all. If it was a servant or a chattel they wanted, they could simply employ them, or compel them into domesticity. No one marries their gun-dog or horse; men seldom married slaves.

It must be said that this book is a particular kind of polemic and not serious social history. It is rather a quick gallop through historical material in order to find a few examples to bolster her case. The significant part played by women in the decadence of ancient Rome, for instance, is ignored but, against the general thrust that women were powerless creatures, we have a quote to the effect that “sexual mischief kept women out of political mischief.” So they were into politics even then, were they: Who would have thought it?

In her account, even when the results of authority acting decisively against anti-social movements are markedly even-handed as between the sexes, *or* biased toward women, she does not see it that way, and manages to describe it as if it were the other way round. She gives a potted history of the suppression of an orgiastic cult in Roman times as if the women were punished more severely than the men, “as usual,” despite the fact that “the male participants were killed; the women were returned to their families; and the families, *held responsible for the women’s behaviour*, were charged

with their punishment” [my emphasis; but note the implicit assumption that “families” does not include any suggestion of a mother, grandmother, aunts or sisters, who might have had an axe to grind].

Ms. Wolf is so obstinately determined to see it as men oppressing women that one can only speculate that this derives from her own defeat by a predatory culture which, without the stalwart support of parents, she was unable to withstand. In the end, she succumbed entirely to its pressure, and thought, felt and acted in accordance with its dictates. She was horribly sexualized as a little girl, as were all her friends, and none of them offered the least resistance to its sway. It was too strong for them, and this fact seems to have imprinted the ineradicable feeling of being eternal victims on her particular group.

This dreadful combination of an over-heated sexual awareness with a feeling of being a victim is the basis of many of the anecdotes she recounts, and the lack of rational connection between them is often striking. For example, she tells the story of a young teenager who goes out to dine with her grandparents in a swanky restaurant and, when there, decides to go and apply heavy make-up in the ladies room. Upon re-appearing at the table, her grandparents recoil in dismay, and tell her to go and wash it off. “What Daria heard,” Naomi solemnly intones, “was . . . . Your nakedness is a failure.” But she wasn’t naked, Naomi. She was modestly dressed. It was she, and you, who drew the nakedness out of a hat, when her grandparents simply meant that she looked ludicrous.

It must have been a painful experience, and one can well imagine the scene. What requires total immersion in the sweaty soup of a trash culture, is the reduction of the humiliation of a dozen different girlish aspirations into a phrase, “your nakedness is a failure,” that is not remotely considered as a metaphor.

This intense, unnatural sexualization of children by a commercial culture, operating without a contrary morality that is taught and defended by parents, produces a lopsidedly indoctrinated child. The child in this case, growing to maturity, recognizes that harm has been done, but she still thinks within the frame of reference that has been imprinted on her. Thus, all her solutions to the problems created are cast also in sexual terms—but ones which she naively thinks are different because they are gathered from remote parts of the globe or from distant times!

Until perhaps real, personal experience gives a clearer view of reality, all her theory arises out of the same dogma of sexuality. This renders Ms. Wolf particularly gullible, as when she commends the view of some ancient Chinese sexologist that sex is tremendously good for the health and



that, therefore, a man should favour his wife at least five times a week until she is fifty.

This is *supposed* to indicate that old China had a better grasp of the finer points of women's sexuality than we have today. In fact, all it indicates is the endearing and perennial attempt by men to increase women's willingness for sexual intercourse. It is the voice of the condom-seller, the voice that Ms. Wolf must have got used to in her formative years, transposed to another age which didn't sell them, perhaps, but was still intent upon pleasure, if not profit.

One has the distinct feeling that Ms. Wolf simply would not be able to comprehend people for whom sex was not the centre of the universe. Unfortunately, it is not sex in its widest meaning that has any resonance for her, and which might lend some validity to her argument. It is quite true that sex plays a part in the relations between people—but *what* a part, and how varied, subtle and intelligent it has always been! The hateful social scene Ms. Wolf describes in *Promiscuities* is not created by a culture that does not value women's sexuality—whatever that is supposed to mean. It is a culture that does not value *anything*.

Even so, it is difficult to believe her account of herself and her contemporaries at school and college. Was there ever a youth movement so passive, supine and uncritical of the pseudo-philosophy it was being fed, as the young people she describes?

Did not even one of them have a sense of irony, or even humor? Was there really no one who ever took a different line about anything? Was no girl ever modest, and no boy chaste? Was there really not an eccentric in any class, a sceptic in any orthodoxy, an outsider in a fraternity group—were there really *no* individuals, only products?

The only sex was the crass, crude short-hand of commercial sex they seemed to have known, which is why Ms. Wolf's solutions to the problems of a generation de-flowered by its culture are so dispiriting. In one respect, she conveys very well the vacuous self-obsession of the children exposed to it, who end up snuffling after sexual sensations like fox-terriers looking for truffles, and you think she must have worked out how to offer something better to future generations.

But alas, her answer is a sort of puritanical version of the *same* thing. That is to say, she advocates teaching children how to indulge in sexual behaviour that stops short of penetrative sex. One can only surmise, since she doesn't feel equal to explaining it, that this is designed to keep "real sex" special, even more than to prevent teenagers getting pregnant. A pretty

silly idea anyway, and as doomed to failure as the poor man on top of the Eiffel Tower with his big feather wings on.

What is more, she wants young people to have “rights of passage”—rituals which elevate their sexual encounters into something “meaningful.” She is unwilling to confront the possibility that sexual activity, as she knows it, *is* meaningless. It is just a passing pleasure, and the “sexuality which participates in the divine,” which she has sensed in other cultures and wants to import into her own, results from insights which link sexuality with marriage, fertility and the miracle of birth. Without that link, sex is at best a leisure activity and at worst an obstacle course about which women are as querulous and hysterical as they once were about modes of speech or the manners of their servants. In these circumstances, it is not a bit surprising that some of the most intelligent people do not even want to do it with women!

So, after analysing quite well the corrosive effects of a sexualized culture projected upon children, Ms. Wolf hints, with a delicacy and circumspection that would have done credit to her grandmother speaking of an operation, that a little censorship wouldn’t come amiss in order to protect the innocent.

Her concluding remarks quote a friend who said he wanted a different sexual culture for his daughter to grow up in: “It shouldn’t be too much to ask that she can just grow up thinking that the way she feels and develops is OK.”

And it shouldn’t be too much to ask that a book as long as this on analysis shouldn’t be so short on solutions. However, Ms. Wolf is a true product of her education, both formal and social. The idea that she might actually break ground and attack the enemy is foreign to her and, in the end, she does not dare.

Her friend’s quote reflects her own approach, and is an almost perfect example of G.K. Chesterton’s observation that there is but a hair’s breadth between meaning well, and meaning nothing.

An *ad hoc* symposium:

“Would God Choose Abortion?”

Abortion became a major socio-political issue in the late 1960s, but some 30 years of continuous polling seems to demonstrate only that most Americans remain confused and contradictory on the issue—a great many still do not understand that the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision actually legalized abortion up to birth (otherwise there *could not be* a “partial birth” controversy), while roughly the same majority that claims to want abortion kept legal also calls it “murder”! But so far as we know, no pollster has ever asked the question: “Do you think that God would choose abortion?”

Too bad, the answers might be extremely interesting: they would certainly test the general perception, which is that “churchgoers” tend to be “pro-life” while the unchurched—not to mention the *unbelieving*—support abortion. It would be even more interesting to see how the “Major Media” reported the results—as everybody knows, the nation’s pundits and “opinion makers” are as famously “Pro-choice” as they are antagonistic to the Old Morality that condemned abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, and so much else that is “politically correct” nowadays.

As it happens, we reprint in this issue something the late great Clare Boothe Luce wrote two decades ago which illuminates—as only Mrs. Luce *could*—both the conflicted state of “public opinion” and the beliefs that gave us the “unalienable right to life” that the Founding Fathers made the *primary* right in the Declaration of Independence.

But here, we consider a much more recent declaration: last April 3, the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* carried a short “manifesto” by the feminist writer Naomi Wolf. Ms. Wolf is known to our regular readers as a leading proponent of “truth” in the abortion controversy: in our *Winter*, 1996 issue we reprinted her now-famous article “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” in which she urged her “Pro-choice” peers to admit what she calls the “gruesome details” of abortion, the better to defend it as a “necessary evil” that can be morally justified. Now she has expanded on that thesis, because the *very* gruesome realities of “partial birth” abortions have made her side’s dilemma even *worse*, calling for imaginative new responses. And she imagines that, in a “religious country” like America, giving God “a seat at the table” could swing the debate her way.

When we first read Ms. Wolf’s proposal to mobilize the “religious left” in support of abortion, we were amazed: Was she *really* confident that God would “choose” abortion? So we began asking various friends and colleagues what *they*

thought—and they in turn wanted *our* opinion. Which gave us an obvious idea: Why not pass along a sampling of all this to our readers?

That is what we hope we have supplied in the following section. What we asked our five “respondents” to do was to focus generally on Ms. Wolf’s Op-Ed piece, and particularly on her call for Divine assistance. In the main, that is what they have done, although (as you will see) Professor George McKenna enlarges on the background—this is by no means Ms. Wolf’s first foray into the “justification” of abortion, so what the good Professor gives you is quite relevant.

Then Mr. David Klinghoffer looks at her arguments from his own perspective: he speaks as an Orthodox Jew, and concludes that Ms. Wolf’s beliefs have much more to do with political liberalism than historic Judaism. Next Miss Karina Rollins—who says she is “entirely sympathetic” to Wolf’s *feelings* about abortion—argues that Ms. Wolf takes a very elitist position on the “necessary evil” and is less interested in discerning what actually *is* God’s will than in marshaling leftist clerics “to explain their support” for abortion.

On the other hand, our friend Richard Brookhiser welcomes Ms. Wolf’s turn “to religion for guidance on the abortion question”—surely the “religious right” has got deep into it, why not what she calls “the religious left”? After all, *both* sides need some lessons in civility, and invoking The Almighty (as the Founding Fathers did so often) might bring some much-needed “good manners” into the debate.

Professor Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, our final “respondent,” surprised us—and no doubt herself as well—by writing quite a bit more than we’d requested; obviously she “warmed” to the subject as she went along—indeed, you can feel the arguments heating up to her formidable finish. But along the way she provides the reader with a welcome service: the short pieces that precede hers cover quite a bit of background with which the casual reader may not be familiar; here, Mrs. Fox-Genovese provides details about many such references and—most usefully—she explains where they can be found. For instance, references to Naomi Wolf’s so-often-quoted “Our Bodies, Our Souls” are followed by the page number for our reprint, so if you wanted to look it up, you would find it on that page in our *Winter*, 1996 issue. (See her footnotes #1 and #2 for more.)

*Then*, you will find the actual text of Ms. Wolf’s *Times* piece. It may seem odd that we would put it *after* so much commentary *on* it, but it seemed rather awkward to *begin* with it and—this way—you can either go straight to it *first* (see pps. 56-58), or save it for last, or refer to it as you read along. That makes good sense to us, anyway.

We hope our whole “Mini Symposium” makes good reading as well. True, we almost feel like sending flowers to Naomi Wolf herself—she gets some rather rough treatment here—but you will also note that she is complimented repeatedly for *causing* all this controversy, and we certainly want to add our own thanks to the rest.

—JPM

## Sheilaism

*George McKenna*

I first ran across Naomi Wolf's views on abortion in an article she wrote for the *New Republic* in October of 1995. It came out shortly after a piece I wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and like mine, had criticized the abortion advocacy movement for hiding the ugly reality of abortion behind euphemisms like "pregnancy termination" and "reproductive health procedures." What made Wolf's piece stand out was not only the fact that it came from someone prominently identified with pro-choice feminism but that it was so scornful of the rhetoric used by abortion advocates. Such rhetoric relied, she said, on "delusions," "fibs," and outright "lies," and the people who used it risked turning themselves into "casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of life." Tough words. Brave words. I still applaud them.

But then, quite unexpectedly, she launched into a weird, creepy riff on "atonement." What made it creepy was that it seemed to promise forgiveness in advance as long as you show your sorrow afterwards. Yes, every abortion kills a human baby "in its full humanity," and that is horrible, but you can do it as long as you work out some sort of a mourning ritual, some way of "saying goodbye." You can do good works, or light candles like the Japanese, or contribute to mothers' aid funds. And bring God into it. While most Americans favor abortion restrictions, she wrote, when the poll question is rephrased to ask respondents whether abortion should be a matter "between a woman, her doctor, her conscience and her God," support for unrestricted abortion soars to more than 70 percent—so if we put it that way we can recapture the moral high ground and out-pietize the religious right. This conclusion was so crass, so Dick Morris-ish and out of keeping with what I thought were the premises of her article, that I entertained the hope she would eventually slough it off.

It was not to be. In an Op-Ed piece published last April 3 in the *New York Times*, Wolf finally made it clear that abortion, for her, is not a moral evil but a public-relations problem, to be resolved by the right choice of words.

The occasion for her latest piece was the still-simmering controversy over

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partial-birth abortion. Here is a prime example of euphemisms and code words used to hide something nasty. Partial-birth abortion is the procedure that dare not speak its name. In early media reports it was mentioned in lead paragraphs only as a mysterious “rarely-used procedure”; if you read on you would find it referred to as “the procedure known to doctors as a D&X.” This was the normal reflex of people who consider themselves compassionate and humane but who support the right to use a procedure that, regrettably, involves stabbing children in the back of their heads and sucking out their brains. “A rarely used procedure”: We know now, as we knew last April, that that was an outright lie, passed on to reporters—who wanted so hard to believe it—by abortion lobbyists, one of whom later admitted that he had “lied through my teeth.”

Wolf noted that these “accusations” of “prevarication” (note the softening polysyllables; no more talk about “lies”) have put the pro-choice movement on the defensive, but declared that “a victory for all Americans” can be insured by “a radical shift in language and philosophy.”

**T**he “philosophy” turned out to be a plea for a technological fix. If you oppose abortion, she said, send your checks to Planned Parenthood. Why? Because Planned Parenthood makes birth-control available. Abortion would be unnecessary if only Americans were afforded “cheap and easily accessible contraception.” Now wait a minute. Right down the block from me is my friendly neighborhood pharmacist, where 26 different kinds of condoms are on sale. There are ribbed condoms, natural lamb condoms, super-thin condoms, ultra-texture condoms and, for the tradition-minded, Trojan Classics.

There they are, prominently displayed on their own rack, in a rainbow of colors. There are also pills, creams, devices, everything imaginable to prevent conception. In New York City high schools kids are given a choice of regular or (for oral sex) peppermint condoms, and colleges include condoms in freshman-orientation packages, complete with diagrams. “Use of birth-control,” Wolf says, “lowers the likelihood of abortion by 85 percent, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute.”

Well, yes. Birth control has been known to lower the likelihood of conception. But for it to work you have to use it, and what other Guttmacher Institute studies have shown is the failure of school-based clinics and other programs that rely on contraceptive distribution. Girls get pregnant for many reasons: because they see nothing wrong with it, because they are too lazy to take precautions, because they think babies are cute, because they need love. In her *New Republic* piece Wolf herself mentioned a reason I had

never heard of before: some girls in her high school got pregnant to see if their boyfriends were loyal enough to accompany them to the clinic and pay for the abortion, which she called “the 1970s Bay Area equivalent of the ’50s fraternity pin.”

How could these pregnancies have been prevented by contraceptives? Indeed, I have seen no empirical evidence to back up Wolf’s claim that the high pregnancy rates in today’s America are the result of a dearth of contraceptives. If anything, since the ’50s the correlation has gone the other way: more contraceptives, more out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

**B**ut technology was only a part of her Op-Ed piece. The main argument seemed to turn on rhetoric and strategy, and here she picked up where she had left off at the end of her 1995 *New Republic* article. There has to be more God in our rhetoric, because—again, her famous statistic—more than 70 percent support abortion when we bring “a woman, her doctor, and God” into it. More Dick Morris talk again, and at this point the whole piece started to verge on self-parody. “The pro-choice movement,” she declared, “should give God a seat at the table.” Not since Jane Russell in the 1950s pronounced God to be a “livin’ doll” has there been such cheerful familiarity with the Creator. It was too much even for one of her pro-choice supporters, a gentleman of the cloth who heads the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. Mildly chiding her in a letter to the *Times*, he suggested that God should not be “just at the table but sitting at the head of it.”

But whether propped up at the head of the table or tucked into one of the side seats, is this poor god worth praying to? Is this the living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—or is it a manikin, a not-so-livin’ doll, hauled out to lend religious aura to what is essentially a secular project? The “Marxist-Freudian, secular-materialist left,” she wrote, “has run out of both ideas and authority.” Maybe so, but at least it was honest about where it was coming from. In the end its case was demonstrably, disastrously wrong, but at least it made its case with argument instead of goopy religiosity.

Will it work, this project of trivializing religion to make it serve the end of “reproductive choice”? The truly religious will see through it, and it is hard to imagine any honest agnostic deciding to believe in God because it sounds good rhetorically. Perhaps it will work on many of the 70 percent who come around to the pro-choice position on abortion when the question is rephrased to put God into it. But I wonder whether it is really worth it to *her*. It is not entirely clear what Naomi Wolf believes about religion. She doesn’t seem to know or care much about any particular one.

She likes Shintoism, but mainly for the theater—the lighting of candles for dead fetuses. She talks about Judaism once in a while, but only vaguely. In this piece she suggested that traditional Judaism is more tolerant of abortion than Catholicism, in the course of which she ventured a rather severe—and ignorant—observation about Catholicism. Unlike Jewish teaching, she says, “traditional Catholic teaching holds that you cannot directly kill a fetus to save the life of the mother.”

Since when? Forty years ago I learned the Catholic principle of “double effect,” which justifies saving the life of a mother even if, in some rare instance, it may have the secondary effect of causing the child’s death. Wolf could have learned that by consulting any priest or knowledgeable lay Catholic, or even by reading the language of Church-approved proposals for restricting abortion, which almost always include a “life of the mother” exception.

Why didn’t she? I would attribute it not to bigotry or laziness but simply to indifference. In the final analysis it doesn’t seem to matter very much whether one gets the facts straight on any particular religion, because, in her mind, all religion is personal anyway.

It’s Sheilaism. In the 1980s sociologist Robert Bellah and his associates went around questioning Americans about their beliefs, and one of their interviewees was a young nurse named Sheila Larson who had been through a lot of therapy. She described her faith as “Sheilaism.” She believed in God but couldn’t remember the last time she went to church. (“I’m not a religious fanatic.”) Her faith had very few tenets. “It’s just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself.” In the end it was “just my own little voice.”

Sheilaism, Naomiism, solipsism: the faith that moves mountains. It can fit anyone, justify anything, make everyone feel comfortable, and, phrased properly, can win approval ratings of at least 70 percent.



# Keeping God Far Away

*David Klinghoffer*

If Gentile Americans were less polite than they are, there is a question a lot of them would be asking. “What is it,” they would say, “about Jews and abortion?” For a group of people who don’t undergo a lot of abortions ourselves, we Jews must appear strangely passionate about keeping abortion legal in all circumstances.

Their observation would be entirely accurate. In an article published last year in *Commentary*, two social scientists revealed something extraordinary about the Jewish affection for this surgery.

Using data from surveys by the National Opinion Research Center, Charles Liebman and Steven Cohen deconstructed the myth of Jewish liberalism. The article showed that, when you control for certain socioeconomic factors, Jews are not on average more liberal than non-Jews. Liberalism just happens to be the ideology of the American upper middle class, and Jews belong disproportionately to that class. The notion that we are drawn to liberalism due to an affinity between the Hebrew prophetic tradition and, for instance, affirmative action or loose welfare laws—an idea beloved by non-Orthodox rabbis—was thus revealed as the fiction it is.

The deconstruction job succeeded almost completely. In two areas, the professors noted, Jews really are more liberal. One is prayer in public schools: 37 percent more Jews oppose it than do non-Jews of a comparable age, income, educational attainment, and place of residence. That was to be expected. Many Jews, influenced by groups like the Anti-Defamation League with a strong fund-raising interest in waving Fundamentalist bogeymen before widened Jewish eyes, see school prayer as a way Christians might force Jewish children to pray to Jesus.

The other respect in which Jews are more liberal than our neighbors is when it comes to sex. Here are the numbers: more Jews cheerfully tolerate abortion, homosexual intercourse, pornography, extramarital sex, and premarital sex than do their non-Jewish peers, by margins of 24, 26, 7, 15, and 7 percent respectively. Differences of 24 and 26 percent can’t be dismissed as anomalies. Gay sex isn’t a political issue, in the sense of there being pending legislation that would change its status under the law. So most striking of all is the calculation that, on abortion, Jews are 24 percent

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more liberal than their non-Jewish counterparts.

This fact can't be explained the way Jewish fears of school prayer can be. Were abortion outlawed tomorrow, that would no more constitute the imposition of Christianity on Jews than it would Judaism on Christians. In their authentic forms, both religions oppose abortion. Unlike prayer, abortion has no sectarian implications.

In fact something psychological is going on here. That's less obvious from polling data than from the testimony of individual Jews.

You probably know somebody who suffers from a compulsion, addiction, phobia, or other mental disorder. Often, people with problems like that clearly perceive the conflict between reason and whatever it is they feel compelled to do or not do. I, for example, don't like tunnels. When I'm sitting at my desk, as I am right now, I believe that there is nothing dangerous about driving through them. But get me into the first ten feet of the Midtown Tunnel here in New York, and instantly I forget all my rational beliefs of five seconds earlier. Oxygen becomes dangerously scarce, or so it seems to me.

Consider the case of Naomi Wolf. A morally sensitive Jewish writer, she has made a specialty of confronting liberals with the ugliness of abortion. She began a campaign against taking abortion lightly with an article, "Our Bodies, Our Souls," and has carried on in television appearances, magazine interviews, and newspaper opinion pieces. Recently in the *New York Times* she was at it again, calling abortion, "since it involves the possibility of another life, . . . a grave decision qualitatively different from medical choices that involve no one but ourselves."

Her approach to the issue goes like this: first she denounces abortion; then, like me as the shadow of the Midtown Tunnel engulfs my car, she loses her mind and forgets everything that, in her rational moments, she knew perfectly well. No sooner has she got through chastising pro-abortion liberals than she has switched sides and joined those who regard efforts to restrict abortion as leading inevitably to the fabled "back alley" where hapless pregnant women are massacred by outlaw abortionists in "deaths as agonizing as those that pro-lifers have been so graphically describing." Rather than make even partial-birth abortions illegal, she would start a national get-out-the-contraceptives crusade.

Part of Miss Wolf's problem is ignorance. Like a lot of young Jews, she has rediscovered Judaism. But in an interview she relates that she has fallen under the influence of a liberal rabbi from the confusingly titled Conservative Movement. This person has been slipping ideas into Miss

Wolf's head. "According to my rabbi," she declares, "the Old Testament says that it is legitimate for a woman to choose abortion up to the fortieth day, up to quickening." Of course the Hebrew Bible says no such thing. In the *Times*, Miss Wolf avers that in Jewish teaching, where there is "a choice between the fetus and the mother, the mother's life, with its adult obligations, must always come first." That sounds like, if the mother has any "adult obligation" that would be compromised by giving birth, for instance the obligation not to miss too many days at work, then the authentic Jewish tradition will let her give the kid the ax. Again, no. For the umpteenth time: true Judaism condones abortion to protect a mother's life, not her lifestyle.

This is ignorance, but not simple, unwilling ignorance. Miss Wolf feels compelled to seek justifications for keeping abortion legal, no matter how unlikely. Probably it never occurred to her to look for that alleged verse in the Bible which mentions the forty-day figure.

In this, she is like a lot of other Jews. The Jewish abortion rate remains remarkably low. We don't want to have the surgery ourselves. We just, desperately, want other people to have the right to it. Christians should wonder where our will comes from to look so kindly on a practice so severely forbidden by Judaism. What they often forget about us is that we have a peculiar relationship with the Torah, the oral and written tradition that Jews for millennia have believed is God's eternal directive to us. To understand Jews and abortion, you must understand our psychology.

Cast your mind back three and a half thousand years ago. When God began to reveal the Torah to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, the assembled Jews, in a combination of ecstasy and terror, found His voice overpowering. After He had spoken only the first two of the Ten Commandments (out of 613 total), they begged Moses to act as an intermediary. For the rest of the forty years the Jews spent in the Wilderness, the divine message would be conveyed with a human voice.

The Torah principle of *yeridah ha'dorot*, the moral inferiority of each human generation in comparison to the generation before, means that with the passage of millennia the human voice of Torah has grown quieter. Every Jew can still hear it, if he wants. But the temptation becomes correspondingly powerful to shut our ears, to drown out the voice with noise from the thumping boombox of secular American civilization.

One of the messages we hear, played endlessly at deafening volume, is that what's called "spirituality" is something we can enjoy without consequences. God may be placed in a box, to be taken out and sniffed, as

someone said of Noel Coward's relationship to his own sexuality, when we feel like it.

For a liberal Jew, "spirituality" is most comforting. Few Jews want to cut themselves off from Torah entirely. On the other hand, very few want to accept the yoke of the Torah and observe its 613 commandments every day of the year. Liberal Jews love "spirituality" because it assures them we can enjoy God's presence in our lives without first submitting to His demands. Our faith need not have any consequences other than those we, at any given moment, choose to let it have.

Abortion, more than any other issue in American politics, has come to signify the negation of this easy-going philosophy. A fearless band of religious Americans, leading a mass movement of less fiercely committed compatriots, has begun to argue that at least when it comes to this one issue, religion should have definite consequences for us all. For as long as abortion has been a technological possibility, Judaism and Christianity have forbidden it. The anti-abortion movement insists that that fact should mean something not only in our private lives but in our public ones.

Christians don't realize what a threatening idea that is for liberal Jews. What anti-abortion activists are saying to them is this: You may not think you have to take God's demands seriously, but we think you do. To be sure, saying that threatens liberal Gentiles too. For Jews and non-Jews, liberalism is the ideology that says: You needn't worry about what God thinks. But liberal Gentiles do not have ancestors who thought that God imposed 613 commandments on them in an eternal covenant. A secular Jew who comes to accept the premise that he has been commanded by God, which a lot of young Jews have done in the past few decades, is bound by an unstoppable logic to change every aspect of his life. A Gentile who accepts the same premise must change a lot about himself, but not nearly as much as a Jew.

Unwittingly, the pro-life movement reminds Jews that Torah demands of us, and only us—everything. No wonder we are 24 percent more likely to support restriction-free abortion. The only surprise is that the figure isn't higher. When liberal Jews hear anti-abortion activists calling for stricter abortion laws, oxygen becomes dangerously scarce, or so it seems to them. In the *New York Times*, Naomi Wolf says she would like to bring God "to the table," but the truth is that, like a lot of other liberal Jews, she would really rather keep Him very far away.

# The Blame Game

*Karina Rollins*

Naomi Wolf thinks abortion is an evil. She also thinks it's necessary. Sometimes. When those times are she explained in her now-famous essay in *The New Republic*, "Our Bodies, Our Souls." For poor, "desperate" women, she deems abortion indispensable and gives it her stamp of approval; but well-off women who abort pregnancies resulting from too many glasses of Chardonnay "have no excuse whatsoever for their carelessness."

Deserving of particular scorn seem to be those "11 percent of abortions [that] are obtained by people in households with incomes higher than \$50,000." While Miss Wolf expresses genuine anguish over the number of abortions and admits what pro-lifers have always claimed ("the death of a fetus is a real death"), her painful soul-searching seems to boil down to: abortion is OK for the poor, but not for people with money.

One and a half years after her defection (as some pro-choice and pro-life leaders see it) from the abortion-means-nothing-it's-just-a-blob-of-tissue mantra, Naomi Wolf continues her effort to explain what is necessary to prevent unwanted pregnancies and thus lower the abortion rate. Still staunchly committed to abortion rights, she argues in her article "Pro-Choice and Pro-Life" in the April 3 *New York Times* that "the pro-choice movement is staring at a great symbolic defeat," but that "with a radical shift in language and philosophy, we can turn this moment into a victory for all Americans." She summarizes what she had explored in her essay—that pro-choice rhetoric relies on euphemisms, that Americans want and need a "moral framework" for dealing with abortion, and that "heartless medicalese" can no longer explain away the gruesome details of abortions.

Never wanting to lay blame (i.e., responsibility) on women who fit her description of "desperate," she is, however, quick to place it elsewhere. She wants language "transformed" to call abortion "a failure" of "technology, social support, education, or male and female responsibility." Yet this last example of failure, the only one where blame is really appropriate, carries little weight, because Miss Wolf extends this responsibility only to the \$50,000-and-up Chardonnay crowd, while poor women (and men) are somehow relieved of the obligation to think before having sex.

She seems to think that rich women could never be desperate, or poor women couldn't be careless after a few cans of beer. Or worse yet, that

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the poor have a built-in excuse for being careless. Relieving women under a certain income level of responsibility for their actions belies Miss Wolf's claim that these same women are responsible enough to make life and death decisions about the babies they are carrying. With so many excuses for not accepting responsibility, Miss Wolf would have us believe that most unwanted pregnancies, and thus abortions, are the fault of someone or something beyond a woman's control.

I am entirely sympathetic to Miss Wolf's *feelings* about abortion: I am revolted by the use of abortion as birth control, yet my heart goes out to the mother who doesn't know how she can possibly feed another mouth. I certainly wouldn't want to be the one to tell a rape victim that she has to carry the baby to term. And, not convinced that abortion at the earliest stage is murder, I don't believe she should have to. But Miss Wolf's reasoning on who is to blame for unwanted pregnancies, and why abortion is morally defensible for some women but not for others, is dubious. As tragic as pregnancies resulting from rape are, they represent a tiny fraction of unwanted babies. The vast majority result from consensual sex. Miss Wolf herself has decried the fact that 43 percent of abortions are undergone by women who have had at least one before.

So who or what is to blame in these cases, and for most of the first-time abortions? Miss Wolf wants to blame technology (modern birth control just doesn't work?), social support (not enough Planned Parenthood offices?), education (not quite enough classes teaching third-graders how to put condoms on bananas?). She even goes on to blame some undisclosed "policies that sustain, tolerate and even guarantee the highest abortion rate of any industrialized nation," and calls them "crimes against women" (another use of her "transformed" language to show *other, uncaring* people's fault at women's predicaments).

The only such policy that comes to mind is the legalization of abortion on demand. Miss Wolf, of course, means such policies as insufficient taxpayer-funded contraception. Again, as in her original essay, her great hunger for a moral framework, all her grappling with difficult and painful issues, lead back to one solution to the overwhelming crisis of abortion—free birth control. "The moral of such awful scenes [late-term abortions] is that a full-fledged campaign for cheap and easily accessible contraception is the best antidote to our shamefully high abortion rate."

But we already have cheap and easily accessible contraception—every drugstore sells condoms and spermicide for less than the cost of a six-pack. (Does Miss Wolf claim that in a country where welfare feeds, clothes, and houses anyone who needs it, there are millions of people so poor they

literally cannot afford a few condoms per week?) And we certainly have the campaign—parents are terrified their 10-year-olds will come home from school toting free condoms, and explaining the benefits of “safe sex.”

Miss Wolf supports her position by saying that “more than half of unplanned pregnancies occur because no contraception was used.” But that does not explain *why* it was not used. Many people, especially teens, know about birth control but choose not to use any. Miss Wolf would probably say that that’s where the education is supposed to come in; she never mentions the possibility that just maybe teens are too young to be having sex in the first place, and need to be told so. “A year of sexual responsibility can easily cost someone \$200 or more,” she continues. Again, the most responsible form of sexual responsibility, which is completely free—abstinence—seems never to occur to her. While not for married couples, it should be touted as *the* solution for the young and unmarried—who make up the vast majority of women seeking abortions.

On her quest to dish out blame, she says “to those who oppose access to contraceptives, yet hold up images of dead fetuses, we should say: This disaster might have been prevented by a few cents-worth of Nonoxynol-9; this blood is on your hands.” Few pro-lifers (certainly none of the mainstream pro-family groups) “oppose access” to birth control, they just don’t want condoms thrown at their kids in school and they don’t want to pay for other people’s birth control (of course, by “access” Miss Wolf *means* paid for by other people). Incredibly, Miss Wolf not only blames social conservatives for the unwanted pregnancy (the result of an unprotected sex act which was the *choice* of both partners), she also makes them culpable for the couple’s, or the woman’s, *choice* to abort. How quickly a woman’s choice between herself, “her doctor, her conscience and her God” becomes blood on other people’s hands because they didn’t pay for her birth control.

In her original essay, Miss Wolf had envisioned a utopia “in which women would be valued so very highly” that “there are affordable, safe contraceptives available for the taking in every public health building.” So it comes as no surprise that her grandiose vision to end abortion requires that “lawmakers must follow through with sweeping policies . . . Congress and the Administration should champion the ‘common ground’ approach, and add to it bipartisan support for financing far more research, development and distribution of contraceptives.”

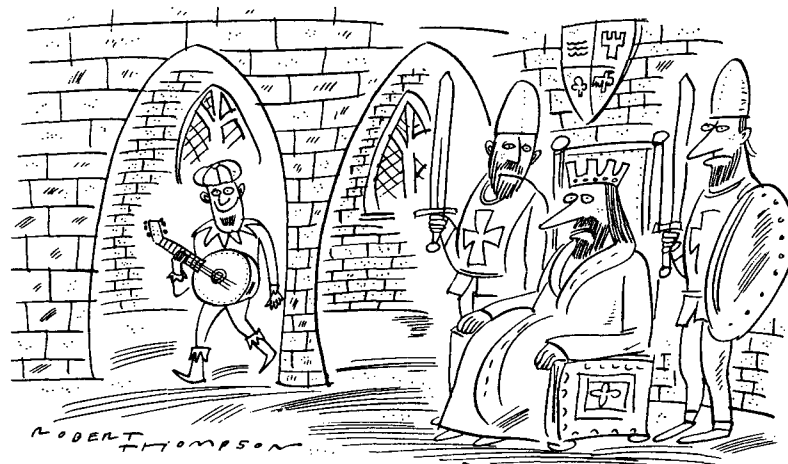
Nothing less than a nation-wide, government-run, taxpayer-funded guarantee to new, fool-proof, and free contraceptives at every corner can stem the tide of abortions. Obsessed with the notion of a natural right to free

KARINA ROLLINS

birth control, Miss Wolf and her “sweeping policies” threaten to undermine the progress her original essay has made and can continue to make in the abortion debate.

The statement that could have had the greatest impact on this debate is Miss Wolf’s call to “give God a seat at the table.” Yet she immediately modifies the implications of her words, so that at her table God gets nothing more than a rickety folding chair. As a way to get God into the discussion, she says, “the emerging ‘religious left’ is where we must turn for new and better ideas.”

This is the same religious left that ordains women and homosexuals as priests, rejects most other traditional Judaeo-Christian teachings, and conveniently, already endorses abortion. Miss Wolf says the pro-choice movement “should call on the ministers, priests and rabbis of the religious left to explain their support of abortion rights in light of *what they understand to be* God’s will” [my emphasis], uninterested in discerning what might *actually* be God’s will. Miss Wolf stays true to her words—her main goal is not to reduce abortions, but to feel good about them.



*'I think I've got pre-minstral tension.'*

THE SPECTATOR 14 June 1997



# God and Good Manners

*Richard Brookhiser*

Naomi Wolf is back, and pro-lifers should welcome her to the fray. It is a sign of the respect we feel for her, and response to the respect she evidently feels for us, that we are willing to rip into her weak spots. This time around, one of her weak spots is related to one of ours.

In "Our Bodies, Our Souls," written in 1995, Wolf yearned for some kind of ceremony to honor aborted children, and console their mothers. She mentioned Shintoism, Judaism, and the New Age as possible sources of ritual. Now in "Pro-Choice and Pro-Life," she turns to religion for guidance on the abortion question as a whole. Since "on issues of values like abortion and assisted suicide, the old Marxist-Freudian, secular-materialist left has run out of both ideas and authority . . . the emerging 'religious left' is where we must turn for new and better ideas." She calls on ministers, priests and rabbis to supply them. Is there any doubt that she will get them? And is there any doubt that the religious right has given her the opportunity?

A certain kind of secular liberalism made conservative-value politics very easy, even as it made sensible and just laws very difficult. Let us call it ACLU liberalism. To ACLU liberals, the right to worship God (or to not worship Him, they always and instantly added) was as important as the right to buy *Hustler*. But it could never be exercised at the expense, or under the aegis, of the state. For forty years, ACLU liberals rampaged through the land, rooting up the shoots of theocracy: one of their earliest and most significant victories was banning prayer in public schools; one of their last and least was telling the City of Philadelphia it must not pay for a podium that would be used during a visit by Pope John Paul II. A city could use tax-payer funds to build a stage for Madonna, but not for the Madonna. Thomas Jefferson did not like the editing to which the Declaration of Independence was subjected; lucky for him there were no ACLU liberals in Philadelphia, or they would have blue-pencilled the bit about Nature's God.

Arguing against such stuff was not difficult. Practically all you had to do was repeat the arguments of the ACLU-types, without frills; they seemed so extreme and ahistorical that they refuted themselves. So began two

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decades of conservative religious polemic, chiefly by evangelical Protestants (led at first by the Moral Majority, more recently by the Christian Coalition), joined by assorted Catholic and Jewish scouts and voyageurs. Give religious Americans a voice, they said, and a place at the table. The public square is naked (i.e., church-and-synagogue-less). All we want is to re-zone it.

So back came the churches and the churchgoers—and not just as bland blessing dispensers, in the manner of the Neapolitan-ice-cream combinations of minister, priest and rabbi at fifties commencement ceremonies, but men and women with doctrines. You can't throw a brick at a Republican convention these days without hitting people who have been born again, and who are happy to tell you about it.

Now Wolf has issued her own call to prayer, asking her soul-mates to rally to the pro-choice side, suitably modified. "People of faith," she says, using the Beltway lingo for conservative believers, "can reach different conclusions about abortion." This is a different strategy from the one advanced by former New York governor Mario Cuomo, the first religious liberal who tried to grapple with the question. In the mid-eighties Cuomo said that he accepted the teachings of his church on abortion, but deferred as a politician to the Supreme Court—in effect, to ACLU liberalism. Cuomo got good press, but not universal respect, even on the left. Garry Wills, in his book *Under God*, hammered him for timidity. Wills wanted Cuomo to say that the Catholic church's position on abortion was wrong (Wills cited many texts from St. Augustine in an attempt to prove it). *Under God* was a fascinating rough draft for the argument that Wolf now advances. Wills realized he could not heap uncritical praise on black preacher-politicians like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesse Jackson, while totally ignoring Pat Robertson or Randall Terry. His book, while examining them sympathetically, also offered them an implicit bribe: trim your sails on your most obnoxious policies, and I will defend you among the eggheads. Robertson and Terry ignored the offer, naturally enough, and Wills turned on them with wrath during the 1992 election. Wolf doesn't waste time trying to make converts. She wants reinforcements from her own side.

Who is to say she will not get them? And what can be the answer of pro-lifers of the religious right, if the religious lefties come? That there are few of them? Is the religious left the runt in the litter of American creeds? Stalin asked how many legions the Pope had. How many does Michael Lerner have, compared to the number that Pat Robertson, or John Cardinal O'Connor can muster? If it comes to a head-count, then the religious right

will probably prevail. But that is not the way to make a constitutional case, or frame a moral argument (except, these days, on the Supreme Court). Is there to be a religious test for the public square? Catholics and Baptists—yes? Shinto New Age Jews—no? (Methodists—we'll get back to you.)

All religious activity in America is the tossing of a giant in its sleep. The giant is Protestantism. Everything else here mimics it. But for most of this century the giant has not been well. As the religious historian Sydney Ahlstrom pointed out, its last two crusades were for Prohibition, and entry into World War I. These did not cover the giant with glory. In the wake of failure and embarrassment, the liberal and conservative sides of the giant's personality, already split, diverged even further. The liberals scored a great moral coup by joining the civil rights movement. More recently, the conservatives have had a good run with values politics. Their efforts to push different agendas will continue. You can call it jockeying for position in the status derby, or you can call it fighting to establish justice in the City of Man. Men being what they are, it is both simultaneously. Wolf may discover that liberal Protestants, and their *Dopplegangers*, liberal Catholics and liberal Jews, will join in her modified pro-choice crusade. If they do, they will bring more firepower than the Shinto New Age Jews (numerous enough, perhaps, at the farewell party for Books & Co. in Manhattan, but less common elsewhere).

But that leaves us where we were when Wolf came in, saying how concerned (and now, how religious) she is: asking ourselves how to make the case against abortion. The most comprehensively persuasive way to make that case is to say that abortion violates the nature of things. In all the instances that most pro-lifers want to ban, it kills a potential human being for not-good-enough reasons. No need to ask ministers, priests, rabbis, or Naomi Wolf about it. Just think about it.

One is often struck by the sheer tact of the Founders. To a man they believed in God, and they invoked Him often, but they did not wear their dogmas on their sleeves. The conventional explanation is that their dogmatism had waned, and for some of them this was true. But perhaps there were other factors: mere reticence—or good manners? You did not address your betters casually two hundred years ago, and that went for the Almighty. Reason can instruct all of us on abortion. The consequences can be difficult, but the reasoning isn't. As LBJ (and Isaiah) said, Let us reason together.

# Abortion and Morality Revisited

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

It has, with good reason, become virtually *pro forma* to thank Naomi Wolf for introducing or, better, reintroducing the moral question into the “pro-choice” side of the debate over abortion. And thanks are, indeed, in order, if only because the attention garnered by her article, “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” reinforced by the public attention to partial birth abortion, has reminded many Americans that there may be a dark side to their easy acceptance of “a woman’s right to choose.”<sup>1</sup> Gratitude for this opening of the discussion should not, however, blind us to Ms. Wolf’s more portentous message, which concerns nothing less than the nature of morality itself.

Ms. Wolf, a committed feminist, has publicly acknowledged that if abortion is a “necessary evil,” it is also “always a matter of deep, moral gravity, a transgression.” In her view, most Americans agree with her that “abortion should be a legal right” but, also like her, “need to be free to recognize it or claim it as a moral iniquity.”<sup>2</sup> The cavalier assumption that we may simultaneously defend abortion as a woman’s legal right while we indulge our own need to recognize its moral gravity takes the breath away, not least because it so nakedly exposes the disintegration of our moral vision.

Ms. Wolf sees no contradiction between her two goals, which she apparently believes can be conjoined in practice through the dedicated building of common ground on which pro-choice and pro-life advocates can meet and work together. Her ambition in this regard is nothing if not sweeping. “I want to transform the way we deal with this problem in the United States.”<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, her specific proposals for transformation seem rather less sweeping than the ambition itself. She imagines a world in which “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” (59). (One can imagine such occasions being announced or commemorated by some appropriate Hallmark cards.)

But she also believes that the possibility of such vigils—and the common

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mourning they imply—depends upon the prior advent of a world in which women and men are truly equal and sexuality is truly free. So the contradiction between her desire to acknowledge abortion as the taking of life and to protect women's unconditional right to it does leave its mark in the utopianism of her picture of the conditions that would foster her proposed solution.

In fairness, neither critics nor supporters have paid much attention to Ms. Wolf's proposed solution, and we may reasonably assume that even she did not give it much thought. Rather, her claim to serious attention lies in her having attempted to underscore the moral gravity of abortion without sacrificing her pro-choice convictions.

Some years ago, in *Feminism Without Illusions*, I also attempted, albeit with much less success than Ms. Wolf is now enjoying, to do the same.<sup>4</sup> There, I argued that no position on abortion that substituted rights—whether of the fetus or the woman—for an acknowledgment of the sanctity of life could do justice to the seriousness of abortion. At the time, I believed that my insistence that the nature of the argument (rights as against the sanctity of life) did not necessarily point toward a complete repudiation of *Roe v. Wade*, although many of my readers readily understood that I would favor a restriction of abortion to the first three or four months.

Subsequently, in an article on feminism and the rhetoric of individual rights, I returned to the issue, arguing, as had Mary Ann Glendon before me, that the story of a woman's right to abortion as "told by our laws is one of desperate loneliness and anomie that is very difficult to reconcile with the prevailing feminist stories about women's special sense of interconnectedness and responsibility."<sup>5</sup>

Although Ms. Wolf notes that others, notably Camille Paglia, Roger Rosenblatt, and Lawrence Tribe, have called attention to aspects of the "logical and ethical absurdity" in the pro-choice position, she does not refer to Glendon's or my work, with which she is presumably familiar. This silence would merit no attention, if it were merely a question of the reference *per se*. But it seems more than likely that she avoided our arguments, many of which she agrees with and even echoes, because both of us raise the question of limitations upon women's access to abortion. Both of us, that is, raise the possibility of restricting abortion to the first trimester, of requiring pre-abortion counseling and a brief waiting period, and of requiring minors to obtain the consent of an adult.

The pro-choice feminists regard all of these measures and others like them as anathema. And the Lawrence Tribe whom Ms. Wolf approvingly

cites ranks as a leading theorist of a woman's right to abortion which, in his view, even requires the murder of an infant who survives an abortion on the grounds that the woman's right actually includes the right to a successful abortion.

Ms. Wolf's apparent unwillingness to entertain the possibility of even marginal limitations upon a woman's access to abortion reveals more than she intended. And her reluctance, forcefully expressed in her *Firing Line* exchange with William Buckley, to label the act of abortion an unqualified evil, confirms the implications of her unwillingness to see a woman's access to abortion curtailed. In the end, what she seeks is not a change in the laws governing abortion but a change in "the language in which we phrase the goals of feminism" (58). But we may only expect such change when women become freer and more powerful, which, she acknowledges, they are becoming.

Meanwhile, "as a result of the bad old days before the Second Wave of feminism," women, she insists in "Our Bodies, Our Souls," still "tend to understand abortion as a desperately needed exit from near-total male control of our reproductive lives" (58). Women, in short, still respond as victims and, like so many victims, tend to take their frustration out upon those even weaker than they.

Ms. Wolf does not fully condone that response, although she above all wishes to convince women that they are no longer as complete victims as women of previous generations had been. But even as she enjoins feminists to acknowledge the essential truth that abortion does stop the beating of a heart, and does kill a baby, she refrains from any criticism of their specific political goals, which she strongly endorses. And even though she hopes that changes in women's social situation will decrease the frequency with which they resort to abortion, she does not seek to change laws or actions, but to change the rhetoric in which feminists defend them. What she cannot face is the possibility that changing the rhetoric may make things worse rather than better.

Others have cogently and eloquently criticized Ms. Wolf's argument in whole or in part, but the main point remains the charge, leveled separately by William McGurn and Rebecca Ryskind Teti, that, in McGurn's words, "if there can be abortion without guilt—better yet without sin—there can be anything."<sup>6</sup> Teti pushes the point home, reminding us that "'the right to do wrong' is simply another expression for 'might makes right.'" If, she adds, "Ms. Wolf is a hard-headed nihilist, perhaps that is what she wants. But she should see that 'might makes right' is a game women can never

win" (82). And nobody better understands women's disadvantage in the world of "might makes right" more than feminists, who have done so much to discredit or strip men of the advantages of might. Abortion thus occupies a unique and uniquely-disturbing place in the feminist agenda, of which it is arguably the lynchpin.

Most feminists offer two main justifications for abortion: 1) that abortion alone can anchor women's equality with men, and 2) that abortion is the *sine qua non* of women's sexual freedom. The two overlap in the recognition that women's ability to bear a child constitutes the primary substantive or natural difference between women and men. Ms. Wolf never challenges that basic understanding, with which she demonstrably concurs. In this perspective, her plea that we recognize the moral gravity of abortion rings hollow indeed. In effect, all she is saying is that a woman has the right to commit even so morally grave an act as murder without being accountable to anyone but "her" God.

For in Ms. Wolf's logic, the gravity of taking the life of an unborn child must count for less than the freedom of the woman to pursue an unencumbered life. The woman's "right to choose" trumps the child's "right to life." And we have come full circle to the longstanding battle over abortion that Ms. Wolf was trying to reorient.

By the time I read Ms. Wolf's article in *The New Republic*, I was receiving instruction to join the Catholic Church, which I did in December of that year. Many longstanding and recent influences had brought me to the Church, but my years of thinking and writing about abortion played a special role. I had long appreciated the gravity of abortion, but like many others had been reluctant to accede to the response which that gravity required.

Personally, the notion of binding moral obligation did not daunt me, but I knew full well that fewer and fewer Americans shared my tolerance in this regard, and I especially worried about political practicality.

Our culture has become so resistant to the notion that a mistake may have consequences that, rather than face those consequences, many of us prefer to rebuff or trivialize the compelling claims of life. Who are we to say that a young woman who unintentionally becomes pregnant should carry the child to term, even at the cost of her own plans for her life? More important, which of us is willing to impose such an obligation on another? Precious few, if the polls are to be trusted.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, Ms. Wolf has got it precisely right: Most Americans do recognize the moral gravity of abortion, and most are extremely reluctant to translate the

recognition of gravity into a moral law.

Isn't it enough—as Ms. Wolf would have it—that God require us to acknowledge abortion as a wrong? How dare He require that we refrain from performing, undergoing, or condoning it? If strong pro-life advocates have acquired a reputation for intransigence, it may be primarily because so many people regard their position as unacceptably authoritarian, while failing to understand that the pro-choice forces are no less so. For one of the main issues between the two groups does concern the very notion of moral authority, and it is on this terrain that the pro-life forces are being most effectively out-manuevered.

Ms. Wolf never allows her evocation of the life of the fetus, or moral gravity and transgression, to compromise the presumptive claims of a woman's right to choose—with whatever anguish and regret—to sacrifice the life of her baby to her own convenience. In this perspective, her distinction among the serious, self-indulgent, and openly fatuous reasons for choosing abortion amounts to no distinction at all. It is reassuringly easy to deplore the girls (and I use the term advisedly) who view abortion as the equivalent of the outmoded fraternity pin—a test of a boyfriend's devotion and commitment.

But we can ill afford to fall into the trap—however comforting and seductive—of taking our own condemnation of such frivolity as proof of our moral standards. For if, as Ms. Wolf concedes, the essence of abortion lies in the termination of a human life, then the distinctions among the reasons for which a woman decides to abort become virtually meaningless.

As with murder, the sheer *finality* of the act of abortion drains most of the reasons for committing it of any compelling significance, or, rather, it demotes them to the status of the accidental. To be sure, some motives are considered to mitigate or qualify murder's status as a crime, preeminently self-defense, but also such variants of it as the "battered woman syndrome." Those who are judged to have committed murder "by reason of insanity" also partially evade the full sanctions that fall upon those who do so with cold premeditation. Normally, however, a clever attorney's first line of defense is to deny that the defendant committed the crime in the first place. In the case of abortion, the claim of innocence is foreclosed, and Ms. Wolf shows no interest in advancing a version of the insanity plea. So, she is left with a variant of self-defense, which she, like other feminists, seems to favor. Unlike many other feminists, however, Wolf stops short of advancing the case for abortion as pure, justified self-defense.



Today, Christians (including the most devout) recognize that when a pregnancy threatens a woman's life, the woman rather than the baby she is carrying should be saved. Presumably, this position embodies something of the Christian and natural law recognition of a fundamental right to self-preservation. But the feminist insistence upon a woman's right to abortion on demand has nothing to do with self-preservation in the sense in which it is commonly understood.

Significantly, President Clinton, out of loyalty to or under pressure from his feminist supporters, refused to sign the ban on partial birth abortion that included an exception to save the life of the mother. And his insistence that the exception must include the "health of the mother" was widely recognized as a way of ensuring the continuing availability of partial birth abortions to virtually all those who seek them. Feminists have never—or never primarily—been interested in outright threats to the life of the mother. What interests them is the quality of a woman's life, which they too often judge to be improved by the absence of children.

Throughout "Our Bodies, Our Souls," Ms. Wolf flirts with the idea that quality of life constitutes a poor justification for murder—indeed, she has been congratulated for having the courage even to suggest this much. But she seems loathe to take the *next* moral and philosophical step, namely to admit that once we acknowledge the fetus as a human life, the grounds for preferring one standard of "quality of life" over another collapse. For feminists, the quality of life at issue is not the one that the baby may expect but the one that its mother currently enjoys. For pro-life advocates, however, the life embodied in the baby takes precedence. For the baby, the stakes are literally self-preservation, whereas, for the mother, they are convenience and comfort.

All things being equal, convenience and comfort have their specific claims, but not claims that override our moral obligations to vulnerable life. No less important, Christianity, like the other major religions, has traditionally taught that an individual who presumes to decide whether another individual should live or die pridefully usurps a power that belongs only to God.

Ms. Wolf *does* know that the claims of life embody a moral imperative which her pro-choice politics cannot encompass. Thus she attempts to work her way out of the impasse by postulating equality between the woman's right to choose the life she wants to live, and the moral claims of the life she is carrying.

The linchpin of her strategy lies in the personalization of morality. Thus,

in the *Firing Line* debate with William Buckley and Helen Alvaré, she refused to concede that abortion is “evil” (although why she thinks calling it a “necessary evil” mitigates its intrinsic evil remains puzzling). Rather, she insists that she is calling for something that Americans find it difficult to do—“to keep in mind simultaneously the legal entitlement to do something . . . while always feeling ourselves to be morally accountable, scrutinizing our motivations.”<sup>8</sup>

No Catholic needs to be reminded about the importance of scrutinizing one’s motivations—and one’s words, thoughts, acts or failures to act. Such self-investigation is the substance of confession. But, in Ms. Wolf’s rendition, what Catholics call the examination of conscience lacks the external authority of God’s judgment and mercy.

In “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” Ms. Wolf bemoans that so many on the left have become “religiously illiterate” and, accordingly, deeply misunderstand the meaning of the word “sin.” She reminds her political comrades that “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” (57). But her very attempt to reclaim a moral and religious sensibility for the Left betrays the limits of her own understanding. To the best of my knowledge, even our heartfelt recognition of sin and atonement for it do not necessarily “bring on” God’s compassion, much less our own redemption. The very essence of God’s omnipotence lies in His independence from our actions and our powerlessness to control Him. The point is not that God is not likely to show mercy to those who sincerely repent of their sins. He is. But we can never know, and, above all, we cannot force His hand. We owe Him, He does not owe us: in the words of Psalm 100, “Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.”

Whatever Ms. Wolf would like to believe, God’s commandments are not a private matter, and believers do not privately negotiate their observance with Him. Faithfulness to God includes the expectation that we will indeed be punished for our sins, although those who sincerely cultivate “a proper fear of judgment” may reasonably place even greater faith in His mercy. For a Catholic, it is sinful presumptuously to judge the depth or sincerity of another’s faith and, like other Christians, we are required to pray for forgiveness for all, including, and perhaps especially, those who seemingly defy the basic tenets of faith.

Nor would I even wish to judge Ms. Wolf’s relations with her God, which are indeed between her and Him. But nothing obligates me to agree

that religious faith is an entirely private matter.

Pro-life intellectuals frequently evoke the analogy between slavery and abortion, arguing that evils of such magnitude command our forceful resistance. At the core of their appeal lies the implicit recognition that fateful moral questions may never be regarded as just another life style. The moment we shroud respect for the sanctity of life—and the right of the most vulnerable members of our society to protection—with the cloak of privacy, we commit ourselves to sanctioning the domination and exploitation of the weak by the strong.

There was a time when I believed that the practicalities of politics in a pluralistic democracy argued for the acceptance of legal abortion during the first trimester of a pregnancy. And a single trimester of legal abortion may still be the best political compromise we can expect. As Marjorie Reiley Maguire argues in her contribution to the symposium on “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” the feminist tendency “to meld the legal justification for abortion with a moral justification for abortion” may be understood as a “reaction to the other swing of the pendulum which demands an absolute conformity between civil law and moral law.”<sup>9</sup>

Arguably the greatest challenge of our time lies in understanding and defending the appropriate relations between civil and moral law—between religion and the polity—in our modern democracy. Abortion, assisted suicide, and the other issues that touch upon the sanctity we accord to human life have brought those tenuous relations to a crisis, and the overwhelming temptation has been to reduce the claims of religion and morality to the privacy of individual conscience.

God, however—as He frequently reminds us—is not mocked. It behooves us to remember that the “privatization” of morality constitutes the ultimate mockery, not merely of His specific laws, but of His authority to establish law in the first place. Notwithstanding a variety of ecumenical initiatives and considerable evidence of good will, the relations among different faiths remain delicate, and the fundamental differences among them are unlikely to be resolved anytime soon. Under these conditions, few Americans are likely to countenance the reestablishment of a specific religion.

Furthermore, some churches and denominations have made substantially greater concessions to the prevailing secularism of our times than others, with the result that, even within the predominant Jewish and Christian traditions, there is little prospect of immediate agreement on many questions. On the main issues, notably those that concern the sanctity of human life, it nonetheless appears that the most important divide does not

separate members of different faiths so much as it separates those who tend toward religious conservatism from those who tend towards religious liberalism—it cuts across the boundaries of specific faiths. Not surprisingly, this divide corresponds closely to the divide between those who are pro-life and those who are pro-choice.

Ms. Wolf has tried to bridge the chasm between the two groups through rhetoric—by claiming, as it were, the rhetoric of life for what Pope John Paul II has called “the culture of death.” Her attempt founders on her determination to view morality as a private matter, but her very failure offers a valuable lesson to those who are pro-life.

Above all, she reminds us that the place to begin is with the inescapable public claims of morality. It is not enough simply to oppose abortion, assisted suicide, cloning, and all the rest. The necessity for such opposition should be self-evident. More important, however, we must begin the long, arduous struggle to reestablish the claims of morality upon our public life. And that struggle requires cooperation with, and respect for, people of faith who differ from us on many specific matters.

The goal cannot be to impose every requirement of our specific religion upon others, but to work with others to establish a climate of respect—dare I say reverence?—for fundamental moral claims. And if we do our work well, we may even begin to convince a majority of Americans that a private morality is as much of an oxymoron as a private law.

In an imperfect—a fallen—world, it is unrealistic to expect a perfect correspondence between civil and moral law. There are things that are Caesar’s, and they should be rendered to him. The outrage comes in rendering unto Caesar the things upon which he has no claim. And among those, the sanctity of human life must always enjoy pride of place.

#### Notes

1. Naomi Wolf, “Our Bodies, Our Souls,” *The New Republic* (16 Oct. 1995), reprinted in the *Human Life Review* XX11, No. 1 (Winter 1996), 45-59. All citations to that article will be to the *Human Life Review* and the page numbers will be given in parentheses in the text.
2. “The Rhetoric of Abortion.” Transcript of *Firing Line* Debate among Naomi Wolf, Helen Alvaré, and William Buckley (26 January 1996), *Human Life Review* XXII, No. 2 (Spring 1996), 87-88.
3. *Ibid*, 90.
4. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

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5. "Feminism and the Rhetoric of Individual Rights, I & II," *Common Knowledge* 1, nos. 1&2 (1992). Mary Ann Glendon, *Abortion and Divorce in Western Law* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1987).
6. William McGurn, "With Friends Like Her," *Human Life Review*, XXII, No. 1 (Winter 1996): 74; Rebecca Ryskind Teti, "You Can't Get There from Here," *loc cit.* 81-4. See also the other contributions to the debate over "Our Bodies, Our Souls" in the same issue.
7. For a fuller discussion, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "*Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life,*" *How Today's Feminist Elite Has Lost Touch With the Real Concerns of Women* (New York, Doubleday/Nan Talese, 1996) and James Davison Hunter, *Before the Shooting Begins: Searching For Democracy in America's Culture Wars* (New York, Free Press, 1994).
8. "The Rhetoric of Abortion," 89.
9. Marjorie Reiley Maguire, "Rhetoric and Reality," *loc cit.*, 66.



## Pro-Choice *and* Pro-Life

Naomi Wolf

**F**rom a pro-choice point of view, things look grim. Last month, came accusations that abortion-rights advocates had prevaricated about how frequently “partial birth” or “intact dilation and evacuation” abortion is performed. Then the House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to ban the procedure. The Senate may soon address the issue, but even if it fails to override President Clinton’s promised veto, the pro-choice movement is staring at a great symbolic defeat.

This looks like a dark hour for those of us who are pro-choice. But, with a radical shift in language and philosophy, we can turn this moment into a victory for all Americans.

How? First, let us stop shying away from the facts. Pro-lifers have made the most of the “partial birth” abortion debate to dramatize the gruesome details of late-term abortions. Then they moved on to the equally unpleasant details of second-trimester abortions. Thus, pro-lifers have succeeded in making queasy many voters who once thought that they were comfortable with *Roe v. Wade*.

Unfortunately, we set ourselves up for this. Our rhetoric has long relied on euphemism. An abortion was simply “a woman’s choice.” We clung to a neutral, abstract language of “privacy” and “rights.” This approach was bound to cede the moral high ground to our opposition and to guarantee an erosion of support for abortion rights. Thirty percent of Americans support abortion based on the “woman’s choice” argument alone, but when people are asked whether abortion should be a matter between “a woman, her doctor, her conscience and her God,” 70 percent agree.

By ignoring this hunger for a moral framework around legal abortion, we inadvertently played into the drama that was performed before Congress. When someone holds up a model of a six-month-old fetus and a pair of surgical scissors, we say, “choice,” and we lose.

Some pro-choicers have recently resorted to heartless medicalese to explain away the upsetting details of late abortions, pointing out that no major surgery is pretty. Such responses make us seem disconnected from our own humane sensibilities. We should acknowledge what most Americans

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want us to: that abortion at any stage, since it involves the possibility of another life, is a grave decision qualitatively different from medical choices that involve no one but ourselves.

What if we transformed our language to reflect the spiritual perceptions of most Americans? What if we called abortion what many believe it to be: a failure, whether that failure is of technology, social support, education, or male and female responsibility? What if we called policies that sustain, tolerate and even guarantee the highest abortion rate of any industrialized nation what they should be called: crimes against women?

If we frankly acknowledged abortion as a necessary evil, a more effective and ethical strategy falls into place. Instead of avoiding pictures of mangled fetuses as if they were pro-life propaganda, we could claim them as our own most eloquent testimony.

Rolling back abortion rights would merely ease lawmakers' consciences, while many women, and more late-term fetuses than are aborted now, would die in back alleys, deaths as agonizing as those that pro-lifers have been so graphically describing. No woman, we should argue, should have to make the terrible choice of a late abortion if there is any alternative. And these late abortions are more likely to occur when 80 percent of women have to travel outside of their counties to end a pregnancy.

The moral of such awful scenes is that a full-fledged campaign for cheap and easily accessible contraception is the best antidote to our shamefully high abortion rate. Use of birth control lowers the likelihood of abortion by 85 percent, according to the Alan Guttmacher Institute. More than half of unplanned pregnancies occur because no contraception was used. If we asked Americans to send checks to Planned Parenthood to help save hundreds of thousands of women a year from having to face abortions, our support would rise exponentially.

A year of sexual responsibility can easily cost someone \$200 or more (and that someone is likely to be female). To those who oppose access to contraceptives, yet hold up images of dead fetuses, we should say: This disaster might have been prevented by a few cents' worth of nonoxynol-9; this blood is on your hands.

For whatever the millions of pro-lifers think about birth control, abortion must surely be worse. A challenge to pro-choicers to abandon a dogmatic approach must be met with a challenge to pro-lifers to separate from the demagogues in their ranks and join us in a drive to prevent unwanted pregnancy.

The Common Ground Network for Life and Choice has brought activists

together from both sides. They are working on insuring better prenatal care; making adoption easier; reducing the rate of teen pregnancy through programs that give girls better opportunities and offer them mentors; and rejecting violent means of protest. They have teamed abortion clinics to prenatal care and adoption clinics to give desperate women real choices. The network has even found that half of the pro-lifers in some of its groups would support a campaign to improve access to birth control.

The pro-choice movement should give God a seat at the table. For many good reasons, including the religious right's often punitive use of Scripture and the ardently anti-abortion position of the Roman Catholic Church, the pro-choice movement has been wary of God-based arguments.

But on issues of values like abortion and assisted suicide, the old Marxist-Freudian, secular-materialist left has run out of both ideas and authority. The emerging "religious left" is where we must turn for new and better ideas. We should call on the ministers, priests and rabbis of the religious left to explain their support of abortion rights in light of what they understand to be God's will.

America is a religious country—and a pluralistic one. Even in debate about "partial birth" abortion, unspoken religious assumptions and differences play a part. While Judaism generally maintains that in a choice between the fetus and the mother, the mother's life, with its adult obligations, must always come first, traditional Catholic teaching holds that you cannot directly kill a fetus to save the life of the mother. Americans must be reminded that people of faith can reach different conclusions about abortion.

Finally, we must press Congress to work with the Clinton Administration to take this approach at the national level. On Jan. 22, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Vice President Al Gore and Tipper Gore took the extraordinary step of calling on abortion providers and their opponents to reject extremism, support efforts to lower the abortion rate and talk with those who do not share their views.

Now lawmakers must follow through with sweeping policies to give that sentiment substance. Congress and the Administration should champion the "common ground" approach, and add to it bipartisan support for financing far more research, development and distribution of contraceptives.

We have all lived with the human cost of our hypocrisies for too long. It is time to abandon symbolic debates on Capitol Hill in favor of policies that can give women—who have been so ill-served by the rigid views on both sides—real help and real choice.



# The Wisdom of Repugnance

*Leon R. Kass*

Our habit of delighting in news of scientific and technological breakthroughs has been sorely challenged by the birth announcement of a sheep named Dolly. Though Dolly shares with previous sheep the “softest clothing, woolly, bright,” William Blake’s question, “Little Lamb, who made thee?” has for her a radically different answer: Dolly was, quite literally, made. She is the work not of nature or nature’s God but of man, an Englishman, Ian Wilmut, and his fellow scientists. What’s more, Dolly came into being not only asexually—ironically, just like “He [who] calls Himself a Lamb”—but also as the genetically identical copy (and the perfect incarnation of the form or blueprint) of a mature ewe, of whom she is a clone. This long-awaited yet not quite expected success in cloning a mammal raised immediately the prospect—and the specter—of cloning human beings: “I a child and Thou a lamb,” despite our differences, have always been equal candidates for creative making, only now, by means of cloning, we may both spring from the hand of man playing at being God.

After an initial flurry of expert comment and public consternation, with opinion polls showing overwhelming opposition to cloning human beings, President Clinton ordered a ban on all federal support for human cloning research (even though none was being supported) and charged the National Bioethics Advisory Commission to report in ninety days on the ethics of human cloning research. The commission (an eighteen-member panel, evenly balanced between scientists and non-scientists, appointed by the president and reporting to the National Science and Technology Council) invited testimony from scientists, religious thinkers and bioethicists, as well as from the general public. It is now deliberating about what it should recommend, both as a matter of ethics and as a matter of public policy.

Congress is awaiting the commission’s report, and is poised to act. Bills to prohibit the use of federal funds for human cloning research have been introduced in the House of Representatives and the Senate; and another bill, in the House, would make it illegal “for any person to use a human somatic cell for the process of producing a human clone.” A fateful decision

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is at hand. To clone or not to clone a human being is no longer an academic question.

**Taking Cloning Seriously, Then and Now**

Cloning first came to public attention roughly thirty years ago, following the successful asexual production, in England, of a clutch of tadpole clones by the technique of nuclear transplantation. The individual largely responsible for bringing the prospect and promise of human cloning to public notice was Joshua Lederberg, a Nobel Laureate geneticist and a man of large vision. In 1966, Lederberg wrote a remarkable article in *The American Naturalist* detailing the eugenic advantages of human cloning and other forms of genetic engineering, and the following year he devoted a column in *The Washington Post*, where he wrote regularly on science and society, to the prospect of human cloning. He suggested that cloning could help us overcome the unpredictable variety that still rules human reproduction, and allow us to benefit from perpetuating superior genetic endowments. These writings sparked a small public debate in which I became a participant. At the time a young researcher in molecular biology at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), I wrote a reply to the *Post*, arguing against Lederberg's amoral treatment of this morally weighty subject and insisting on the urgency of confronting a series of questions and objections, culminating in the suggestion that "the programmed reproduction of man will, in fact, dehumanize him."

Much has happened in the intervening years. It has become harder, not easier, to discern the true meaning of human cloning. We have in some sense been softened up to the idea—through movies, cartoons, jokes and intermittent commentary in the mass media, some serious, most lighthearted. We have become accustomed to new practices in human reproduction: not just in vitro fertilization, but also embryo manipulation, embryo donation and surrogate pregnancy. Animal biotechnology has yielded transgenic animals and a burgeoning science of genetic engineering, easily and soon to be transferable to humans.

Even more important, changes in the broader culture make it now vastly more difficult to express a common and respectful understanding of sexuality, procreation, nascent life, family, and the meaning of motherhood, fatherhood and the links between the generations. Twenty-five years ago, abortion was still largely illegal and thought to be immoral, the sexual revolution (made possible by the extramarital use of the pill) was still in its infancy, and few had yet heard about the reproductive rights of single women, homosexual men and lesbians. (Never mind shameless memoirs

about one's own incest!) Then one could argue, without embarrassment, that the new technologies of human reproduction—babies without sex—and their confounding of normal kin relations—who's the mother: the egg donor, the surrogate who carries and delivers, or the one who rears?—would “undermine the justification and support that biological parenthood gives to the monogamous marriage.” Today, defenders of stable, monogamous marriage risk charges of giving offense to those adults who are living in “new family forms” or to those children who, even without the benefit of assisted reproduction, have acquired either three or four parents or one or none at all. Today, one must even apologize for voicing opinions that twenty-five years ago were nearly universally regarded as the core of our culture's wisdom on these matters. In a world whose once-given natural boundaries are blurred by technological change and whose moral boundaries are seemingly up for grabs, it is much more difficult to make persuasive the still compelling case against cloning human beings. As Raskolnikov put it, “man gets used to everything—the beast!”

Indeed, perhaps the most depressing feature of the discussions that immediately followed the news about Dolly was their ironical tone, their genial cynicism, their moral fatigue: “AN UDDER WAY OF MAKING LAMBS” (*Nature*), “WHO WILL CASH IN ON BREAKTHROUGH IN CLONING?” (*The Wall Street Journal*), “IS CLONING BAAAAAAAAD?” (*The Chicago Tribune*). Gone from the scene are the wise and courageous voices of Theodosius Dobzhansky (genetics), Hans Jonas (philosophy) and Paul Ramsey (theology) who, only twenty-five years ago, all made powerful moral arguments against ever cloning a human being. We are now too sophisticated for such argumentation; we wouldn't be caught in public with a strong moral stance, never mind an absolutist one. We are all, or almost all, post-modernists now.

Cloning turns out to be the perfect embodiment of the ruling opinions of our new age. Thanks to the sexual revolution, we are able to deny in practice, and increasingly in thought, the inherent procreative teleology of sexuality itself. But, if sex has no intrinsic connection to generating babies, babies need have no necessary connection to sex. Thanks to feminism and the gay rights movement, we are increasingly encouraged to treat the natural heterosexual difference and its preeminence as a matter of “cultural construction.” But if male and female are not normatively complementary and generatively significant, babies need not come from male and female complementarity. Thanks to the prominence and the acceptability of divorce and out-of-wedlock births, stable, monogamous marriage as the ideal home for procreation is no longer the agreed-upon cultural norm. For

this new dispensation, the clone is the ideal emblem: the ultimate “single-parent child.”

Thanks to our belief that all children should be *wanted* children (the more high-minded principle we use to justify contraception and abortion), sooner or later only those children who fulfill our wants will be fully acceptable. Through cloning, we can work our wants and wills on the very identity of our children, exercising control as never before. Thanks to modern notions of individualism and the rate of cultural change, we see ourselves not as linked to ancestors and defined by traditions, but as projects for our own self-creation, not only as self-made men but also man-made selves; and self-cloning is simply an extension of such rootless and narcissistic self-re-creation.

Unwilling to acknowledge our debt to the past and unwilling to embrace the uncertainties and the limitations of the future, we have a false relation to both: cloning personifies our desire fully to control the future, while being subject to no controls ourselves. Enchanted and enslaved by the glamour of technology, we have lost our awe and wonder before the deep mysteries of nature and of life. We cheerfully take our own beginnings in our hands, and, like the last man, we blink.

Part of the blame for our complacency lies, sadly, with the field of bioethics itself, and its claim to expertise in these moral matters. Bioethics was founded by people who understood that the new biology touched and threatened the deepest matters of our humanity: bodily integrity, identity and individuality, lineage and kinship, freedom and self-command, eros and aspiration, and the relations and strivings of body and soul. With its capture by analytic philosophy, however, and its inevitable routinization and professionalization, the field has by and large come to content itself with analyzing moral arguments, reacting to new technological developments and taking on emerging issues of public policy, all performed with a naïve faith that the evils we fear can all be avoided by compassion, regulation and a respect for autonomy. Bioethics has made some major contributions in the protection of human subjects and in other areas where personal freedom is threatened; but its practitioners, with few exceptions, have turned the big human questions into pretty thin gruel.

One reason for this is that the piecemeal formation of public policy tends to grind down large questions of morals into small questions of procedure. Many of the country's leading bioethicists have served on national commissions or state task forces and advisory boards, where, understandably, they have found utilitarianism to be the only ethical vocabulary acceptable to all participants in discussing issues of law, regulation and

public policy. As many of these commissions have been either officially under the aegis of NIH or the Health and Human Services Department, or otherwise dominated by powerful voices for scientific progress, the ethicists have for the most part been content, after some "values clarification" and wringing of hands, to pronounce their blessings upon the inevitable. Indeed, it is the bioethicists, not the scientists, who are now the most articulate defenders of human cloning: the two witnesses testifying before the National Bioethics Advisory Commission in favor of cloning human beings were bioethicists, eager to rebut what they regard as the irrational concerns of those of us in opposition. One wonders whether this commission, constituted like the previous commissions, can tear itself sufficiently free from the accommodationist pattern of rubber-stamping all technical innovation, in the mistaken belief that all other goods must bow down before the gods of better health and scientific advance.

If it is to do so, the commission must first persuade itself, as we all should persuade ourselves, not to be complacent about what is at issue here. Human cloning, though it is in some respects continuous with previous reproductive technologies, also represents something radically new, in itself and in its easily foreseeable consequences. The stakes are very high indeed. I exaggerate, but in the direction of the truth, when I insist that we are faced with having to decide nothing less than whether human procreation is going to remain human, whether children are going to be made rather than begotten, whether it is a good thing, humanly speaking, to say yes in principle to the road which leads (at best) to the dehumanized rationality of *Brave New World*. This is not business as usual, to be fretted about for a while but finally to be given our seal of approval. We must rise to the occasion and make our judgments as if the future of our humanity hangs in the balance. For so it does.

#### The State of the Art

If we should not underestimate the significance of human cloning, neither should we exaggerate its imminence or misunderstand just what is involved. The procedure is conceptually simple. The nucleus of a mature but unfertilized egg is removed and replaced with a nucleus obtained from a specialized cell of an adult (or fetal) organism (in Dolly's case, the donor nucleus came from mammary gland epithelium). Since almost all the hereditary material of a cell is contained within its nucleus, the renucleated egg and the individual into which this egg develops are genetically identical to the organism that was the source of the transferred nucleus. An unlimited number of genetically identical individuals—clones—could be

produced by nuclear transfer. In principle, any person, male or female, newborn or adult, could be cloned, and in any quantity. With laboratory cultivation and storage of tissues, cells outliving their sources make it possible even to clone the dead.

The technical stumbling block, overcome by Wilmut and his colleagues, was to find a means of reprogramming the state of the DNA in the donor cells, reversing its differentiated expression and restoring its full totipotency, so that it could again direct the entire process of producing a mature organism. Now that this problem has been solved, we should expect a rush to develop cloning for other animals, especially livestock, in order to propagate in perpetuity the champion meat or milk producers. Though exactly how soon someone will succeed in cloning a human being is anybody's guess, Wilmut's technique, almost certainly applicable to humans, makes *attempting* the feat an imminent possibility.

Yet some cautions are in order and some possible misconceptions need correcting. For a start, cloning is not Xeroxing. As has been reassuringly reiterated, the clone of Mel Gibson, though his genetic double, would enter the world hairless, toothless and peeing in his diapers, just like any other human infant. Moreover, the success rate, at least at first, will probably not be very high: the British transferred 277 adult nuclei into enucleated sheep eggs, and implanted twenty-nine clonal embryos, but they achieved the birth of only one live lamb clone. For this reason, among others, it is unlikely that, at least for now, the practice would be very popular, and there is no immediate worry of mass-scale production of multicopies. The need of repeated surgery to obtain eggs and, more crucially, of numerous borrowed wombs for implantation will surely limit use, as will the expense; besides, almost everyone who is able will doubtless prefer nature's sexier way of conceiving.

Still, for the tens of thousands of people already sustaining over 200 assisted-reproduction clinics in the United States and already availing themselves of in vitro fertilization, intracytoplasmic sperm injection and other techniques of assisted reproduction, cloning would be an option with virtually no added fuss (especially when the success rate improves). Should commercial interests develop in "nucleus-banking," as they have in sperm-banking; should famous athletes or other celebrities decide to market their DNA the way they now market their autographs and just about everything else; should techniques of embryo and germline genetic testing and manipulation arrive as anticipated, increasing the use of laboratory assistance in order to obtain "better" babies—should all this come to pass, then cloning, if it is permitted, could become more than a marginal practice simply

on the basis of free reproductive choice, even without any social encouragement to upgrade the gene pool or to replicate superior types. Moreover, if laboratory research on human cloning proceeds, even without any intention to produce cloned humans, the existence of cloned human embryos in the laboratory, created to begin with only for research purposes, would surely pave the way for later baby-making implantations.

In anticipation of human cloning, apologists and proponents have already made clear possible uses of the perfected technology, ranging from the sentimental and compassionate to the grandiose. They include: providing a child for an infertile couple; “replacing” a beloved spouse or child who is dying or has died; avoiding the risk of genetic disease; permitting reproduction for homosexual men and lesbians who want nothing sexual to do with the opposite sex; securing a genetically identical source of organs or tissues perfectly suitable for transplantation; getting a child with a genotype of one’s own choosing, not excluding oneself; replicating individuals of great genius, talent or beauty—having a child who really could “be like Mike”; and creating large sets of genetically identical humans suitable for research on, for instance, the question of nature versus nurture, or for special missions in peace and war (not excluding espionage), in which using identical humans would be an advantage. Most people who envision the cloning of human beings, of course, want none of these scenarios. That they cannot say why is not surprising. What is surprising, and welcome, is that, in our cynical age, they are saying anything at all.

#### **The Wisdom of Repugnance**

“Offensive.” “Grotesque.” “Revolting.” “Repugnant.” “Repulsive.” These are the words most commonly heard regarding the prospect of human cloning. Such reactions come both from the man or woman in the street and from the intellectuals, from believers and atheists, from humanists and scientists. Even Dolly’s creator has said he “would find it offensive” to clone a human being.

People are repelled by many aspects of human cloning. They recoil from the prospect of mass production of human beings, with large clones of look-alikes, compromised in their individuality; the idea of father-son or mother-daughter twins; the bizarre prospects of a woman giving birth to and rearing a genetic copy of herself, her spouse or even her deceased father or mother; the grotesqueness of conceiving a child as an exact replacement for another who has died; the utilitarian creation of embryonic genetic duplicates of oneself, to be frozen away or created when necessary, in case of need for homologous tissues or organs for transplantation; the

narcissism of those who would clone themselves and the arrogance of others who think they know who deserves to be cloned or which genotype any child-to-be should be thrilled to receive; the Frankensteinian hubris to create human life and increasingly to control its destiny; man playing God. Almost no one finds any of the suggested reasons for human cloning compelling; almost everyone anticipates its possible misuses and abuses. Moreover, many people feel oppressed by the sense that there is probably nothing we can do to prevent it from happening. This makes the prospect all the more revolting.

Revulsion is not an argument; and some of yesterday's repugnances are today calmly accepted—though, one must add, not always for the better. In crucial cases, however, repugnance is the emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason's power fully to articulate it. Can anyone really give an argument fully adequate to the horror which is father-daughter incest (even with consent), or having sex with animals, or mutilating a corpse, or eating human flesh, or even just (just!) raping or murdering another human being? Would anybody's failure to give full rational justification for his or her revulsion at these practices make that revulsion ethically suspect? Not at all. On the contrary, we are suspicious of those who think that they can rationalize away our horror, say, by trying to explain the enormity of incest with arguments only about the genetic risks of inbreeding.

The repugnance at human cloning belongs in this category. We are repelled by the prospect of cloning human beings not because of the strangeness or novelty of the undertaking, but because we intuit and feel, immediately and without argument, the violation of things that we rightfully hold dear. Repugnance, here as elsewhere, revolts against the excesses of human willfulness, warning us not to transgress what is unspeakably profound. Indeed, in this age in which everything is held to be permissible so long as it is freely done, in which our given human nature no longer commands respect, in which our bodies are regarded as mere instruments of our autonomous rational wills, repugnance may be the only voice left that speaks up to defend the central core of our humanity. Shallow are the souls that have forgotten how to shudder.

The goods protected by repugnance are generally overlooked by our customary ways of approaching all new biomedical technologies. The way we evaluate cloning ethically will in fact be shaped by how we characterize it descriptively, by the context into which we place it, and by the perspective from which we view it. The first task for ethics is proper description. And here is where our failure begins.



Typically, cloning is discussed in one or more of three familiar contexts, which one might call the technological, the liberal and the meliorist. Under the first, cloning will be seen as an extension of existing techniques for assisting reproduction and determining the genetic makeup of children. Like them, cloning is to be regarded as a neutral technique, with no inherent meaning or goodness, but subject to multiple uses, some good, some bad. The morality of cloning thus depends absolutely on the goodness or badness of the motives and intentions of the cloners: as one bioethicist defender of cloning puts it, “the ethics must be judged [only] by the way the parents nurture and rear their resulting child and whether they bestow the same love and affection on a child brought into existence by a technique of assisted reproduction as they would on a child born in the usual way.”

The liberal (or liberationist) perspective sets cloning in the context of rights, freedoms and personal empowerment. Cloning is just a new option for exercising an individual’s right to reproduce or to have the kind of child that he or she wants. Alternatively, cloning enhances our liberation (especially women’s liberation) from the confines of nature, the vagaries of chance, or the necessity for sexual mating. Indeed, it liberates women from the need for men altogether, for the process requires only eggs, nuclei and (for the time being) uteri—plus, of course, a healthy dose of our (allegedly “masculine”) manipulative science that likes to do all these things to mother nature and nature’s mothers. For those who hold this outlook, the only moral restraints on cloning are adequately informed consent and the avoidance of bodily harm. If no one is cloned without her consent, and if the clonant is not physically damaged, then the liberal conditions for licit, hence moral, conduct are met. Worries that go beyond violating the will or maiming the body are dismissed as “symbolic”—which is to say, unreal.

The meliorist perspective embraces valetudinarians and also eugenicists. The latter were formerly more vocal in these discussions, but they are now generally happy to see their goals advanced under the less threatening banners of freedom and technological growth. These people see in cloning a new prospect for improving human beings—minimally, by ensuring the perpetuation of healthy individuals by avoiding the risks of genetic disease inherent in the lottery of sex, and maximally, by producing “optimum babies,” preserving outstanding genetic material, and (with the help of soon-to-come techniques for precise genetic engineering) enhancing inborn human capacities on many fronts. Here the morality of cloning as a means is

justified solely by the excellence of the end, that is, by the outstanding traits of individuals cloned—beauty, or brawn, or brains.

These three approaches, all quintessentially American and all perfectly fine in their places, are sorely wanting as approaches to human procreation. It is, to say the least, grossly distorting to view the wondrous mysteries of birth, renewal and individuality, and the deep meaning of parent-child relations, largely through the lens of our reductive science and its potent technologies. Similarly, considering reproduction (and the intimate relations of family life!) primarily under the political-legal, adversarial and individualistic notion of rights can only undermine the private yet fundamentally social, cooperative and duty-laden character of child-bearing, child-rearing and their bond to the covenant of marriage. Seeking to escape entirely from nature (in order to satisfy a natural desire or a natural right to reproduce!) is self-contradictory in theory and self-alienating in practice. For we are erotic beings only because we are embodied beings, and not merely intellects and wills unfortunately imprisoned in our bodies. And, though health and fitness are clearly great goods, there is something deeply disquieting in looking on our prospective children as artful products perfectible by genetic engineering, increasingly held to our willfully imposed designs, specifications and margins of tolerable error.

### **The Profundity of Sex**

The technical, liberal and meliorist approaches all ignore the deeper anthropological, social and, indeed, ontological meanings of bringing forth new life. To this more fitting and profound point of view, cloning shows itself to be a major alteration, indeed, a major violation, of our given nature as embodied, gendered and engendering beings—and of the social relations built on this natural ground. Once this perspective is recognized, the ethical judgment on cloning can no longer be reduced to a matter of motives and intentions, rights and freedoms, benefits and harms, or even means and ends. It must be regarded primarily as a matter of meaning: Is cloning a fulfillment of human begetting and belonging? Or is cloning rather, as I contend, their pollution and perversion? To pollution and perversion, the fitting response can only be horror and revulsion; and conversely, generalized horror and revulsion are *prima facie* evidence of foulness and violation. The burden of moral argument must fall entirely on those who want to declare the widespread repugnances of humankind to be mere timidity or superstition.

Yet repugnance need not stand naked before the bar of reason. The wisdom of our horror at human cloning can be partially articulated, even

if this is finally one of those instances about which the heart has its reasons that reason cannot entirely know.

To see cloning in its proper context, we must begin not, as I did before, with laboratory technique, but with the anthropology—natural and social—of sexual reproduction.

Sexual reproduction—by which I mean the generation of new life from (exactly) two complementary elements, one female, one male, (usually) through coitus—is established (if that is the right term) not by human decision, culture or tradition, but by nature; it is the natural way of all mammalian reproduction. By nature, each child has two complementary biological progenitors. Each child thus stems from and unites exactly two lineages. In natural generation, moreover, the precise genetic constitution of the resulting offspring is determined by a combination of nature and chance, not by human design: each human child shares the common natural human species genotype, each child is genetically (equally) kin to each (both) parent(s), yet each child is also genetically unique.

These biological truths about our origins foretell deep truths about our identity and about our human condition altogether. Every one of us is at once equally human, equally enmeshed in a particular familial nexus of origin, and equally individuated in our trajectory from birth to death—and, if all goes well, equally capable (despite our mortality) of participating, with a complementary other, in the very same renewal of such human possibility through procreation. Though less momentous than our common humanity, our genetic individuality is not humanly trivial. It shows itself forth in our distinctive appearance through which we are everywhere recognized; it is revealed in our “signature” marks of fingerprints and our self-recognizing immune system; it symbolizes and foreshadows exactly the unique, never-to-be-repeated character of each human life.

Human societies virtually everywhere have structured child-rearing responsibilities and systems of identity and relationship on the bases of these deep natural facts of begetting. The mysterious yet ubiquitous “love of one’s own” is everywhere culturally exploited, to make sure that children are not just produced but well cared for and to create for everyone clear ties of meaning, belonging and obligation. But it is wrong to treat such naturally rooted social practices as mere cultural constructs (like left- or right-driving, or like burying or cremating the dead) that we can alter with little human cost. What would kinship be without its clear natural grounding? And what would identity be without kinship? We must resist those who have begun to refer to sexual reproduction as the “traditional method of reproduction,” who would have us regard as merely traditional, and by

implication arbitrary, what is in truth not only natural but most certainly profound.

Asexual reproduction, which produces “single-parent” offspring, is a radical departure from the natural human way, confounding all normal understandings of father, mother, sibling, grandparent, etc., and all moral relations tied thereto. It becomes even more of a radical departure when the resulting offspring is a clone derived not from an embryo, but from a mature adult to whom the clone would be an identical twin; and when the process occurs not by natural accident (as in natural twinning), but by deliberate human design and manipulation; and when the child’s (or children’s) genetic constitution is pre-selected by the parent(s) (or scientists). Accordingly, as we will see, cloning is vulnerable to three kinds of concerns and objections, related to these three points: cloning threatens confusion of identity and individuality, even in small-scale cloning; cloning represents a giant step (though not the first one) toward transforming procreation into manufacture, that is, toward the increasing depersonalization of the process of generation and, increasingly, toward the “production” of human children as artifacts, products of human will and design (what others have called the problem of “commodification” of new life); and cloning—like other forms of eugenic engineering of the next generation—represents a form of despotism of the cloners over the cloned, and thus (even in benevolent cases) represents a blatant violation of the inner meaning of parent-child relations, of what it means to have a child, of what it means to say “yes” to our own demise and “replacement.”

Before turning to these specific ethical objections, let me test my claim of the profundity of the natural way by taking up a challenge recently posed by a friend. What if the given natural human way of reproduction were asexual, and we now had to deal with a new technological innovation—artificially induced sexual dimorphism and the fusing of complementary gametes—whose inventors argued that sexual reproduction promised all sorts of advantages, including hybrid vigor and the creation of greatly increased individuality? Would one then be forced to defend natural asexuality because it was natural? Could one claim that it carried deep human meaning?

The response to this challenge broaches the ontological meaning of sexual reproduction. For it is impossible, I submit, for there to have been human life—or even higher forms of animal life—in the absence of sexuality and sexual reproduction. We find asexual reproduction only in the lowest forms of life: bacteria, algae, fungi, some lower invertebrates. Sexuality brings with it a new and enriched relationship to the world. Only sexual animals

can seek and find complementary others with whom to pursue a goal that transcends their own existence. For a sexual being, the world is no longer an indifferent and largely homogeneous *otherness*, in part edible, in part dangerous. It also contains some very special and related and complementary beings, of the same kind but of opposite sex, toward whom one reaches out with special interest and intensity. In higher birds and mammals, the outward gaze keeps a lookout not only for food and predators, but also for prospective mates; the beholding of the many splendored world is suffused with desire for union, the animal antecedent of human eros and the germ of sociality. Not by accident is the human animal both the sexiest animal—whose females do not go into heat but are receptive throughout the estrous cycle and whose males must therefore have greater sexual appetite and energy in order to reproduce successfully—and also the most aspiring, the most social, the most open and the most intelligent animal.

The soul-elevating power of sexuality is, at bottom, rooted in its strange connection to mortality, which it simultaneously accepts and tries to overcome. Asexual reproduction may be seen as a continuation of the activity of self-preservation. When one organism buds or divides to become two, the original being is (doubly) preserved, and nothing dies. Sexuality, by contrast, means perishability and serves replacement; the two that come together to generate one soon will die. Sexual desire, in human beings as in animals, thus serves an end that is partly hidden from, and finally at odds with, the self-serving individual. Whether we know it or not, when we are sexually active we are voting with our genitalia for our own demise. The salmon swimming upstream to spawn and die tell the universal story: sex is bound up with death, to which it holds a partial answer in procreation.

The salmon and the other animals evince this truth blindly. Only the human being can understand what it means. As we learn so powerfully from the story of the Garden of Eden, our humanization is coincident with sexual self-consciousness, with the recognition of our sexual nakedness and all that it implies: shame at our needy incompleteness, unruly self-division and finitude; awe before the eternal; hope in the self-transcending possibilities of children and a relationship to the divine. In the sexually self-conscious animal, sexual desire can become eros, lust can become love. Sexual desire humanly regarded is thus sublimated into erotic longing for wholeness, completion and immortality, which drives us knowingly into the embrace and its generative fruit—as well as into all the higher human possibilities of deed, speech and song.

Through children, a good common to both husband and wife, male and female achieve some genuine unification (beyond the mere sexual "union," which fails to do so). The two become one through sharing generous (not needy) love for this third being as good. Flesh of their flesh, the child is the parents' own commingled being externalized, and given a separate and persisting existence. Unification is enhanced also by their commingled work of rearing. Providing an opening to the future beyond the grave, carrying not only our seed but also our names, our ways and our hopes that they will surpass us in goodness and happiness, children are a testament to the possibility of transcendence. Gender duality and sexual desire, which first draws our love upward and outside of ourselves, finally provide for the partial overcoming of the confinement and limitation of perishable embodiment altogether.

Human procreation, in sum, is not simply an activity of our rational wills. It is a more complete activity precisely because it engages us bodily, erotically and spiritually, as well as rationally. There is wisdom in the mystery of nature that has joined the pleasure of sex, the inarticulate longing for union, the communication of the loving embrace and the deep-seated and only partly articulate desire for children in the very activity by which we continue the chain of human existence and participate in the renewal of human possibility. Whether or not we know it, the severing of procreation from sex, love and intimacy is inherently dehumanizing, no matter how good the product.

We are now ready for the more specific objections to cloning.

#### **The Perversities of Cloning**

First, an important if formal objection: any attempt to clone a human being would constitute an unethical experiment upon the resulting child-to-be. As the animal experiments (frog and sheep) indicate, there are grave risks of mishaps and deformities. Moreover, because of what cloning means, one cannot presume a future cloned child's consent to be a clone, even a healthy one. Thus, ethically speaking, we cannot even get to know whether or not human cloning is feasible.

I understand, of course, the philosophical difficulty of trying to compare a life with defects against nonexistence. Several bioethicists, proud of their philosophical cleverness, use this conundrum to embarrass claims that one can injure a child in its conception, precisely because it is only thanks to that complained-of conception that the child is alive to complain. But common sense tells us that we have no reason to fear such philosophisms. For we surely know that people can harm and even maim children in the

very act of conceiving them, say, by paternal transmission of the AIDS virus, maternal transmission of heroin dependence or, arguably, even by bringing them into being as bastards or with no capacity or willingness to look after them properly. And we believe that to do this intentionally, or even negligently, is inexcusable and clearly unethical.

The objection about the impossibility of presuming consent may even go beyond the obvious and sufficient point that a clonant, were he subsequently to be asked, could rightly resent having been made a clone. At issue are not just benefits and harms, but doubts about the very independence needed to give proper (even retroactive) consent, that is, not just the capacity to choose but the disposition and ability to choose freely and well. It is not at all clear to what extent a clone will truly be a moral agent. For, as we shall see, in the very fact of cloning, and of rearing him as a clone, his makers subvert the cloned child's independence, beginning with that aspect that comes from knowing that one was an unbidden surprise, a gift, to the world, rather than the designed result of someone's artful project.

Cloning creates serious issues of identity and individuality. The cloned person may experience concerns about his distinctive identity not only because he will be in genotype and appearance identical to another human being, but, in this case, because he may also be twin to the person who is his "father" or "mother"—if one can still call them that. What would be the psychic burdens of being the "child" or "parent" of your twin? The cloned individual, moreover, will be saddled with a genotype that has already lived. He will not be fully a surprise to the world. People are likely always to compare his performances in life with that of his alter ego. True, his nurture and his circumstance in life will be different; genotype is not exactly destiny. Still, one must also expect parental and other efforts to shape this new life after the original—or at least to view the child with the original version always firmly in mind. Why else did they clone from the star basketball player, mathematician and beauty queen—or even dear old dad—in the first place?

Since the birth of Dolly, there has been a fair amount of doublespeak on this matter of genetic identity. Experts have rushed in to reassure the public that the clone would in no way be the same person, or have any confusions about his or her identity: as previously noted, they are pleased to point out that the clone of Mel Gibson would not be Mel Gibson. Fair enough. But one is shortchanging the truth by emphasizing the additional importance of the intrauterine environment, rearing and social setting: genotype obviously matters plenty. That, after all, is the only reason to

clone, whether human beings or sheep. The odds that clones of Wilt Chamberlain will play in the NBA are, I submit, infinitely greater than they are for clones of Robert Reich.

Curiously, this conclusion is supported, inadvertently, by the one ethical sticking point insisted on by friends of cloning: no cloning without the donor's consent. Though an orthodox liberal objection, it is in fact quite puzzling when it comes from people (such as Ruth Macklin) who also insist that genotype is not identity or individuality, and who deny that a child could reasonably complain about being made a genetic copy. If the clone of Mel Gibson would not be Mel Gibson, why should Mel Gibson have grounds to object that someone had been made his clone? We already allow researchers to use blood and tissue samples for research purposes of no benefit to their sources: my falling hair, my expectorations, my urine and even my biopsied tissues are "not me" and not mine. Courts have held that the profit gained from uses to which scientists put my discarded tissues do not legally belong to me. Why, then, no cloning without consent—including, I assume, no cloning from the body of someone who just died? What harm is done the donor, if genotype is "not me"? Truth to tell, the only powerful justification for objecting is that genotype really does have something to do with identity, and everybody knows it. If not, on what basis could Michael Jordan object that someone cloned "him," say, from cells taken from a "lost" scraped-off piece of his skin? The insistence on donor consent unwittingly reveals the problem of identity in all cloning.

Genetic distinctiveness not only symbolizes the uniqueness of each human life and the independence of its parents that each human child rightfully attains. It can also be an important support for living a worthy and dignified life. Such arguments apply with great force to any large-scale replication of human individuals. But they are sufficient, in my view, to rebut even the first attempts to clone a human being. One must never forget that these are human beings upon whom our eugenic or merely playful fantasies are to be enacted.

Troubled psychic identity (distinctiveness), based on all-too-evident genetic identity (sameness), will be made much worse by the utter confusion of social identity and kinship ties. For, as already noted, cloning radically confounds lineage and social relations, for "offspring" as for "parents." As bioethicist James Nelson has pointed out, a female child cloned from her "mother" might develop a desire for a relationship to her "father," and might understandably seek out the father of her "mother," who is after all also her biological twin sister. Would "grandpa," who thought his paternal



duties concluded, be pleased to discover that the clonant looked to him for paternal attention and support?

Social identity and social ties of relationship and responsibility are widely connected to, and supported by, biological kinship. Social taboos on incest (and adultery) everywhere serve to keep clear who is related to whom (and especially which child belongs to which parents), as well as to avoid confounding the social identity of parent-and-child (or brother-and-sister) with the social identity of lovers, spouses and co-parents. True, social identity is altered by adoption (but as a matter of the best interest of already living children: we do not deliberately produce children for adoption). True, artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization with donor sperm, or whole embryo donation, are in some way forms of “prenatal adoption”—a not altogether unproblematic practice. Even here, though, there is in each case (as in all sexual reproduction) a known single female source of egg—a genetic father and a genetic mother—should anyone care to know (as adopted children often do) who is genetically related to whom.

In the case of cloning, however, there is but one “parent.” The usually sad situation of the “single-parent child” is here deliberately planned, and with a vengeance. In the case of self-cloning, the “offspring” is, in addition, one’s twin; and so the dreaded result of incest—to be parent to one’s sibling—is here brought about deliberately, albeit without any act of coitus. Moreover, all other relationships will be confounded. What will father, grandfather, aunt, cousin, sister mean? Who will bear what ties and what burdens? What sort of social identity will someone have with one whole side—“father’s” or “mother’s”—necessarily excluded? It is no answer to say that our society, with its high incidence of divorce, remarriage, adoption, extramarital childbearing and the rest, already confounds lineage and confuses kinship and responsibility for children (and everyone else), unless one also wants to argue that this is, for children, a preferable state of affairs.

Human cloning would also represent a giant step toward turning begetting into making, procreation into manufacture (literally, something “hand-made”), a process already begun with in vitro fertilization and genetic testing of embryos. With cloning, not only is the process in hand, but the total genetic blueprint of the cloned individual is selected and determined by the human artisans. To be sure, subsequent development will take place according to natural processes; and the resulting children will still be recognizably human. But we here would be taking a major step into making man himself simply another one of the man-made things. Human nature

becomes merely the last part of nature to succumb to the technological project, which turns all of nature into raw material at human disposal, to be homogenized by our rationalized technique according to the subjective prejudices of the day.

How does begetting differ from making? In natural procreation, human beings come together, complementarily male and female, to give existence to another being who is formed, exactly as we were, *by what we are*: living, hence perishable, hence aspiringly erotic, human beings. In clonal reproduction, by contrast, and in the more advanced forms of manufacture to which it leads, we give existence to a being not by what we are but by what we intend and design. As with any product of our making, no matter how excellent, the artificer stands above it, not as an equal but as a superior, transcending it by his will and creative prowess. Scientists who clone animals make it perfectly clear that they are engaged in instrumental making; the animals are, from the start, designed as means to serve rational human purposes. In human cloning, scientists and prospective "parents" would be adopting the same technocratic mentality to human children: human children would be their artifacts.

Such an arrangement is profoundly dehumanizing, no matter how good the product. Mass-scale cloning of the same individual makes the point vividly; but the violation of human equality, freedom and dignity are present even in a single planned clone. And procreation dehumanized into manufacture is further degraded by commodification, a virtually inescapable result of allowing babymaking to proceed under the banner of commerce. Genetic and reproductive biotechnology companies are already growth industries, but they will go into commercial orbit once the Human Genome Project nears completion. Supply will create enormous demand. Even before the capacity for human cloning arrives, established companies will have invested in the harvesting of eggs from ovaries obtained at autopsy or through ovarian surgery, practiced embryonic genetic alteration, and initiated the stockpiling of prospective donor tissues. Through the rental of surrogate-womb services, and through the buying and selling of tissues and embryos, priced according to the merit of the donor, the commodification of nascent human life will be unstoppable.

Finally, and perhaps most important, the practice of human cloning by nuclear transfer—like other anticipated forms of genetic engineering of the next generation—would enshrine and aggravate a profound and mischievous misunderstanding of the meaning of having children and of the parent-child relationship. When a couple now chooses to procreate, the partners are saying yes to the emergence of new life in its novelty, saying yes not

only to having a child but also, tacitly, to having whatever child this child turns out to be. In accepting our finitude and opening ourselves to our replacement, we are tacitly confessing the limits of our control. In this ubiquitous way of nature, embracing the future by procreating means precisely that we are relinquishing our grip, in the very activity of taking up our own share in what we hope will be the immortality of human life and the human species. This means that our children are not *our* children: they are not our property, nor our possessions. Neither are they supposed to live our lives for us, or anyone else's life but their own. To be sure, we seek to guide them on their way, imparting to them not just life but nurturing, love, and a way of life; to be sure, they bear our hopes that they will live fine and flourishing lives, enabling us in small measure to transcend our own limitations. Still, their genetic distinctiveness and independence are the natural foreshadowing of the deep truth that they have their own and never-before-enacted life to live. They are sprung from a past, but they take an uncharted course into the future.

Much harm is already done by parents who try to live vicariously through their children. Children are sometimes compelled to fulfill the broken dreams of unhappy parents; John Doe Jr. or the III is under the burden of having to live up to his forebear's name. Still, if most parents have hopes for their children, cloning parents will have expectations. In cloning, such overbearing parents take at the start a decisive step which contradicts the entire meaning of the open and forward-looking nature of parent-child relations. The child is given a genotype that has already lived, with full expectation that this blueprint of a past life ought to be controlling of the life that is to come. Cloning is inherently despotic, for it seeks to make one's children (or someone else's children) after one's own image (or an image of one's choosing) and their future according to one's will. In some cases, the despotism may be mild and benevolent. In other cases, it will be mischievous and downright tyrannical. But despotism—the control of another through one's will—it inevitably will be.

#### Meeting Some Objections

The defenders of cloning, of course, are not wittingly friends of despotism. Indeed, they regard themselves mainly as friends of freedom: the freedom of individuals to reproduce, the freedom of scientists and inventors to discover and devise and to foster "progress" in genetic knowledge and technique. They want large-scale cloning only for animals, but they wish to preserve cloning as a human option for exercising our "right to reproduce"—our right to have children, and children with "desirable genes."

As law professor John Robertson points out, under our “right to reproduce” we already practice early forms of unnatural, artificial and extra-marital reproduction, and we already practice early forms of eugenic choice. For this reason, he argues, cloning is no big deal.

We have here a perfect example of the logic of the slippery slope, and the slippery way in which it already works in this area. Only a few years ago, slippery slope arguments were used to oppose artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization using unrelated sperm donors. Principles used to justify these practices, it was said, will be used to justify more artificial and more eugenic practices, including cloning. Not so, the defenders retorted, since we can make the necessary distinctions. And now, without even a gesture at making the necessary distinctions, the continuity of practice is held by itself to be justificatory.

The principle of reproductive freedom as currently enunciated by the proponents of cloning logically embraces the ethical acceptability of sliding down the entire rest of the slope—to producing children ectogenetically from sperm to term (should it become feasible) and to producing children whose entire genetic makeup will be the product of parental eugenic planning and choice. If reproductive freedom means the right to have a child of one’s own choosing, by whatever means, it knows and accepts no limits.

But, far from being legitimated by a “right to reproduce,” the emergence of techniques of assisted reproduction and genetic engineering should compel us to reconsider the meaning and limits of such a putative right. In truth, a “right to reproduce” has always been a peculiar and problematic notion. Rights generally belong to individuals, but this is a right which (before cloning) no one can exercise alone. Does the right then inhere only in couples? Only in married couples? Is it a (woman’s) right to carry or deliver or a right (of one or more parents) to nurture and rear? Is it a right to have your own biological child? Is it a right only to attempt reproduction, or a right also to succeed? Is it a right to acquire the baby of one’s choice?

The assertion of a negative “right to reproduce” certainly makes sense when it claims protection against state interference with procreative liberty, say, through a program of compulsory sterilization. But surely it cannot be the basis of a tort claim against nature, to be made good by technology, should free efforts at natural procreation fail. Some insist that the right to reproduce embraces also the right against state interference with the free use of all technological means to obtain a child. Yet such a position cannot be sustained: for reasons having to do with the means employed, any community may rightfully prohibit surrogate pregnancy, or polygamy, or

the sale of babies to infertile couples, without violating anyone's basic human "right to reproduce." When the exercise of a previously innocuous freedom now involves or impinges on troublesome practices that the original freedom never was intended to reach, the general presumption of liberty needs to be reconsidered.

We do indeed already practice negative eugenic selection, through genetic screening and prenatal diagnosis. Yet our practices are governed by a norm of health. We seek to prevent the birth of children who suffer from known (serious) genetic diseases. When and if gene therapy becomes possible, such diseases could then be treated, in utero or even before implantation—I have no ethical objection in principle to such a practice (though I have some practical worries), precisely because it serves the medical goal of healing existing individuals. But therapy, to be therapy, implies not only an existing "patient." It also implies a norm of health. In this respect, even germline gene "therapy," though practiced not on a human being but on egg and sperm, is less radical than cloning, which is in no way therapeutic. But once one blurs the distinction between health promotion and genetic enhancement, between so-called negative and positive eugenics, one opens the door to all future eugenic designs. "To make sure that a child will be healthy and have good chances in life": this is Robertson's principle, and owing to its latter clause it is an utterly elastic principle, with no boundaries. Being over eight feet tall will likely produce some very good chances in life, and so will having the looks of Marilyn Monroe, and so will a genius-level intelligence.

Proponents want us to believe that there are legitimate uses of cloning that can be distinguished from illegitimate uses, but by their own principles no such limits can be found. (Nor could any such limits be enforced in practice.) Reproductive freedom, as they understand it, is governed solely by the subjective wishes of the parents-to-be (plus the avoidance of bodily harm to the child). The sentimentally appealing case of the childless married couple is, on these grounds, indistinguishable from the case of an individual (married or not) who would like to clone someone famous or talented, living or dead. Further, the principle here endorsed justifies not only cloning but, indeed, all future artificial attempts to create (manufacture) "perfect" babies.

A concrete example will show how, in practice no less than in principle, the so-called innocent case will merge with, or even turn into, the more troubling ones. In practice, the eager parents-to-be will necessarily be subject to the tyranny of expertise. Consider an infertile married couple, she

lacking eggs or he lacking sperm, that wants a child of their (genetic) own, and propose to clone either husband or wife. The scientist-physician (who is also co-owner of the cloning company) points out the likely difficulties—a cloned child is not really their (genetic) child, but the child of only *one* of them; this imbalance may produce strains on the marriage; the child might suffer identity confusion; there is a risk of perpetuating the cause of sterility; and so on—and he also points out the advantages of choosing a donor nucleus. Far better than a child of their own would be a child of their own choosing. Touting his own expertise in selecting healthy and talented donors, the doctor presents the couple with his latest catalog containing the pictures, the health records and the accomplishments of his stable of cloning donors, samples of whose tissues are in his deep freeze. Why not, dearly beloved, a more perfect baby?

The “perfect baby,” of course, is the project not of the infertility doctors, but of the eugenic scientists and their supporters. For them, the paramount right is not the so-called right to reproduce but what biologist Bentley Glass called, a quarter of a century ago, “the right of every child to be born with a sound physical and mental constitution, based on a sound genotype . . . the inalienable right to a sound heritage.” But to secure this right, and to achieve the requisite quality control over new human life, human conception and gestation will need to be brought fully into the bright light of the laboratory, beneath which it can be fertilized, nourished, pruned, weeded, watched, inspected, prodded, pinched, cajoled, injected, tested, rated, graded, approved, stamped, wrapped, sealed and delivered. There is no other way to produce the perfect baby.

Yet we are urged by proponents of cloning to forget about the science fiction scenarios of laboratory manufacture and multiple-copied clones, and to focus only on the homely cases of infertile couples exercising their reproductive rights. But why, if the single cases are so innocent, should multiplying their performance be so off-putting? (Similarly, why do others object to people making money off this practice, if the practice itself is perfectly acceptable?) When we follow the sound ethical principle of universalizing our choice—“would it be right if everyone cloned a Wilt Chamberlain (with his consent, of course)? Would it be right if everyone decided to practice asexual reproduction?”—we discover what is wrong with these seemingly innocent cases. The so-called science fiction cases make vivid the meaning of what looks to us, mistakenly, to be benign.

Though I recognize certain continuities between cloning and, say, in vitro fertilization, I believe that cloning differs in essential and important ways. Yet those who disagree should be reminded that the “continuity”

argument cuts both ways. Sometimes we establish bad precedents, and discover that they were bad only when we follow their inexorable logic to places we never meant to go. Can the defenders of cloning show us today how, on their principles, we will be able to see producing babies (“perfect babies”) entirely in the laboratory or exercising full control over their genotypes (including so-called enhancement) as ethically different, in any essential way, from present forms of assisted reproduction? Or are they willing to admit, despite their attachment to the principle of continuity, that the complete obliteration of “mother” or “father,” the complete depersonalization of procreation, the complete manufacture of human beings and the complete genetic control of one generation over the next would be ethically problematic and essentially different from current forms of assisted reproduction? If so, where and how will they draw the line, and why? I draw it at cloning, for all the reasons given.

#### **Ban the Cloning of Humans**

What, then, should we do? We should declare that human cloning is unethical in itself and dangerous in its likely consequences. In so doing, we shall have the backing of the overwhelming majority of our fellow Americans, and of the human race, and (I believe) of most practicing scientists. Next, we should do all that we can to prevent the cloning of human beings. We should do this by means of an international legal ban if possible, and by a unilateral national ban, at a minimum. Scientists may secretly undertake to violate such a law, but they will be deterred by not being able to stand up proudly to claim the credit for their technological bravado and success. Such a ban on clonal baby-making, moreover, will not harm the progress of basic genetic science and technology. On the contrary, it will reassure the public that scientists are happy to proceed without violating the deep ethical norms and intuitions of the human community.

This still leaves the vexed question about laboratory research using early embryonic human clones, specially created only for such research purposes, with no intention to implant them into a uterus. There is no question that such research holds great promise for gaining fundamental knowledge about normal (and abnormal) differentiation, and for developing tissue lines for transplantation that might be used, say, in treating leukemia or in repairing brain or spinal cord injuries—to mention just a few of the conceivable benefits. Still, unrestricted clonal embryo research will surely make the production of living human clones much more likely. Once the genes put the cloned embryos into the bottles, who can strictly control

where they go (especially in the absence of legal prohibitions against implanting them to produce a child)?

I appreciate the potentially great gains in scientific knowledge and medical treatment available from embryo research, especially with cloned embryos. At the same time, I have serious reservations about creating human embryos for the sole purpose of experimentation. There is something deeply repugnant and fundamentally transgressive about such a utilitarian treatment of prospective human life. This total, shameless exploitation is worse, in my opinion, than the “mere” destruction of nascent life. But I see no added objections, as a matter of principle, to creating and using *cloned* early embryos for research purposes, beyond the objections that I might raise to doing so with embryos produced sexually.

And yet, as a matter of policy and prudence, any opponent of the manufacture of cloned humans must, I think, in the end oppose also the creating of cloned human embryos. Frozen embryonic clones (belonging to whom?) can be shuttled around without detection. Commercial ventures in human cloning will be developed without adequate oversight. In order to build a fence around the law, prudence dictates that one oppose—for this reason alone—all production of cloned human embryos, even for research purposes. We should allow all cloning research on animals to go forward, but the only safe trench that we can dig across the slippery slope, I suspect, is to insist on the inviolable distinction between animal and human cloning.

Some readers, and certainly most scientists, will not accept such prudent restraints, since they desire the benefits of research. They will prefer, even in fear and trembling, to allow human embryo cloning research to go forward.

Very well. Let us test them. If the scientists want to be taken seriously on ethical grounds, they must at the very least agree that embryonic research may proceed if and only if it is preceded by an absolute and effective ban on all attempts to implant into a uterus a cloned human embryo (cloned from an adult) to produce a living child. Absolutely no permission for the former without the latter.

The National Bioethics Advisory Commission’s recommendations regarding this matter should be watched with the greatest care. Yielding to the wishes of the scientists, the commission will almost surely recommend that cloning human embryos for research be permitted. To allay public concern, it will likely also call for a temporary moratorium—not a legislative ban—on implanting cloned embryos to make a child, at least until such time as cloning techniques will have been perfected and rendered “safe” (precisely through the permitted research with cloned embryos). But



the call for a moratorium rather than a legal ban would be a moral and practical failure. Morally, this ethics commission would (at best) be waffling on the main ethical question, by refusing to declare the production of human clones unethical (or ethical). Practically, a moratorium on implantation cannot provide even the minimum protection needed to prevent the production of cloned humans.

Opponents of cloning need therefore to be vigilant. Indeed, no one should be willing even to consider a recommendation to allow the embryo research to proceed unless it is accompanied by a call for *prohibiting* implantation and until steps are taken to make such a prohibition effective.

Technically, the National Bioethics Advisory Commission can advise the president only on federal policy, especially federal funding policy. But given the seriousness of the matter at hand, and the grave public concern that goes beyond federal funding, the commission should take a broader view. (If it doesn't, Congress surely will.) Given that most assisted reproduction occurs in the private sector, it would be cowardly and insufficient for the commission to say, simply, "no federal funding" for such practices. It would be disingenuous to argue that we should allow federal funding so that we would then be able to regulate the practice; the private sector will not be bound by such regulations. Far better, for virtually everyone concerned, would be to distinguish between research on embryos and baby-making, and to call for a complete national and international ban (effected by legislation and treaty) of the latter, while allowing the former to proceed (at least in private laboratories).

The proposal for such a legislative ban is without American precedent, at least in technological matters, though the British and others have banned cloning of human beings, and we ourselves ban incest, polygamy and other forms of "reproductive freedom." Needless to say, working out the details of such a ban, especially a global one, would be tricky, what with the need to develop appropriate sanctions for violators. Perhaps such a ban will prove ineffective; perhaps it will eventually be shown to have been a mistake. But it would at least place the burden of practical proof where it belongs: on the proponents of this horror, requiring them to show very clearly what great social or medical good can be had only by the cloning of human beings.

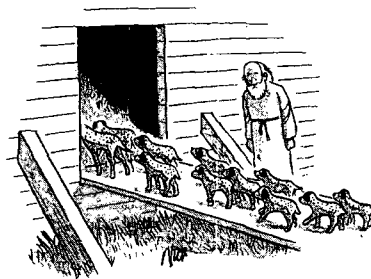
We Americans have lived by, and prospered under, a rosy optimism about scientific and technological progress. The technological imperative—if it can be done, it must be done—has probably served us well, though we should admit that there is no accurate method for weighing benefits

LEON R. KASS

and harms. Even when, as in the cases of environmental pollution, urban decay or the lingering deaths that are the unintended by-products of medical success, we recognize the unwelcome outcomes of technological advance, we remain confident in our ability to fix all the “bad” consequences—usually by means of still newer and better technologies. How successful we can continue to be in such post hoc repairing is at least an open question. But there is very good reason for shifting the paradigm around, at least regarding those technological interventions into the human body and mind that will surely effect fundamental (and likely irreversible) changes in human nature, basic human relationships, and what it means to be a human being. Here we surely should not be willing to risk everything in the naïve hope that, should things go wrong, we can later set them right.

The president’s call for a moratorium on human cloning has given us an important opportunity. In a truly unprecedented way, we can strike a blow for the human control of the technological project, for wisdom, prudence and human dignity. The prospect of human cloning, so repulsive to contemplate, is the occasion for deciding whether we shall be slaves of unregulated progress, and ultimately its artifacts, or whether we shall remain free human beings who guide our technique toward the enhancement of human dignity. If we are to seize the occasion, we must, as the late Paul Ramsey wrote,

raise the ethical questions with a serious and not a frivolous conscience. A man of frivolous conscience announces that there are ethical quandaries ahead that we must urgently consider before the future catches up with us. By this he often means that we need to devise a new ethics that will provide the rationalization for doing in the future what men are bound to do because of new actions and interventions science will have made possible. In contrast a man of serious conscience means to say in raising urgent ethical questions that there may be some things that men should never do. The good things that men do can be made complete only by the things they refuse to do.



THE SPECTATOR 3 May 1997

## Clare Boothe Luce Revisited:

### “The Woman of the Century”<sup>9</sup>

Back in the 1950s, when President Dwight Eisenhower sent Mrs. Clare Boothe Luce to Rome as U.S. Ambassador—the first woman to hold such a high post—nobody was surprised. Mrs. Luce had been the “first woman” to do so many things by then, it was not unusual to see press stories describing her as America’s “Woman of the Century” (even though it was hardly past *mid*-century); her usual competition in the polls of the day was Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt!

Since her death (at 84) a decade ago, not much has been written about “CBL” or her pioneering “manly” feminism—in truth, the Feminist Establishment doesn’t much like her kind of *macha*, preferring an aggrieved Gloria Steinem to a successful Margaret Thatcher—it’s hard to demand special treatment when you’re already beating the competition? But now Mrs. Luce is back in the news, *via* a ballyhooed new biography by Sylvia Jukes Morris, *Rage for Fame* (Random House).

In fact, the book covers only CBL’s early years, up to her election to the U.S. Congress (from Connecticut) in 1942, after she has won fame as a War Correspondent for Husband Henry’s *Life* magazine; a second volume will presumably complete the story. But it has been given lead reviews nationwide, and there is general agreement that Mrs. Morris really didn’t much like Mrs. Luce, whom she portrays as cold-blooded and power hungry, etc.

That must seem a great pity to many who actually knew Mrs. Luce. We didn’t get to know her well (although we’d had journalistic contacts since 1963) until we began work on this journal. It was in the fall of 1974 and, for our first issue (due out the following January), we naturally wanted some “name” writers. So, just as naturally, we asked Clare if she would “do us a piece?” Her answer was typical, and jolting. “*Jim*,” she boomed out in that formidable voice, “I can’t imagine *you* taking on a lost cause”—which, in her judgment, was what a journal dedicated to fighting legalized abortion would end up being.

But also typically, Clare was a great help, with both ideas and contacts, and as you might imagine, she knew *everybody*. And, in due course, she *did* contribute a number of pieces to this journal, perhaps never more memorably than in early 1978.

Here is how it happened: we had got a fund-raising letter (dated December 19, 1977) from the then-aggressive “Women’s Lobby, Inc.”—it was just an ordinary “direct mail” thing, but the letterhead listed a “Board of Sponsors” intended to show that “prominent American women” supported the Lobby; listed prominently among them was The Honorable Clare Boothe Luce.

In early January, we sent the mailing down to Mrs. Luce in Washington with a note: “Did you *know* you were on this letterhead?” Days later Clare called: “Do you believe I got that mailing too? They’re asking *me* for money!” But, we asked, had she actually “signed on” to the Lobby? Pause: “Well, I *must* have, sometime. But you know how these things are. What should I do? Tell ’em to take my name off, I suppose. I suppose that’s what *you’ll* say.”

Yes, we said, but why not do *more*? Why not *answer* the letter, it would make a good story for us, we could print the whole thing—she groaned (and could she *groan*), but the idea evidently hit home. After changing the subject, she ended the conversation with “And maybe I *will* answer that letter, I’ll let you know.”

A week or so later, a manila envelope arrived *via* old-fashioned Special Delivery: Clare *had* done an answer, to which she’d paper-clipped a scribbled note “It’s yours. Clare.” Delighted, we ran the whole *shebang* in our Spring, 1978 issue, using Clare’s letter as a lead, and running the Lobby’s fund-raiser as *Appendix A*.

**W**hat makes us recount all this ancient history now? Well, as we read the various reviews of *Rage for Fame*, we couldn’t help grinding our teeth: however accurate the description of the “young Clare,” the book certainly did not portray the woman we knew later. And, as the *Wall Street Journal*’s reviewer began, “For years I have been hearing the name of Clare Boothe Luce without really knowing a great deal about her.” The reviewer is obviously of the younger generations that are indeed unlikely ever to know much about the “real” Clare. So it seems both timely and fitting that we should serve up a pungent sample of the kind of thing that made her both famous and feared, certainly by lesser polemicists, which included just about *anybody*.

To provide the proper setting, we reprint below the original Women’s Lobby letter, just as we ran it almost 20 years ago, followed by Mrs. Luce’s reply, also just as it ran then (including even our thumb-nail description of the author).

We admit to having a good laugh as we re-read Clare’s letter; at the

*time* we would have loved to know the reaction it produced at the Lobby! But Mrs. Luce received no reply—*also* typical, she was a very difficult woman to answer. But you can imagine that part for yourself now.

You will note that CBL did not get everything exactly right—e.g., Congress *did* give the ERA another seven years—but she was devastatingly accurate on the crucial point: the abortion factor had already doomed the amendment's ratification.

So read on: you are getting a slice of history that richly deserves repeating, and hearing the echo of a voice that no one who heard the real thing could ever forget. —JPM

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## APPENDIX A

*[The following is the complete text of a letter sent by the Women's Lobby, Inc., to its own supporters; the Lobby's letterhead lists, among its "Board of Sponsors," a number of prominent American women, including the Honorable Clare Boothe Luce. Mrs. Luce's reply is printed elsewhere in this issue. Mr. Henry Hyde (mentioned in the letter) read both this letter and Mrs. Luce's reply into the Congressional Record (March 7, 1978, p. E1061).]*

### Women's Lobby, Inc.

*December 19, 1977*

DEAR WOMEN'S LOBBY DONOR:

During the past six months the Congress has voted more than a dozen times on how to limit Medicaid abortions. The House would impose a complete ban regardless of the effects of the pregnancy on mother or child, but this position was modified to accommodate the Senate. The Senate language allows for rape, incest, or danger to the life of the mother, where abortion may be necessary.

On December 7, a compromise was reached. It allows poor women to have abortions under Medicaid if two doctors certify that the mother will suffer serious physical health damage because of the pregnancy. It also allows for "medical procedures" in cases of rape or incest promptly reported to a law enforcement agency or public health service. This provision still leaves thousands of poor women scrounging, begging and borrowing money to gain the same rights guaranteed to any middle class woman. It is an appalling situation. Unfortunately, it will not be easily changed.

For the last year, the Lobby has had one full time staff person working solely on the abortion issue. During the crucial first Votes, we roamed the halls, spent

CLARE BOOTHE LUCE

hours in the Senate receiving room and the lobby of the House chamber, just calling Members off the floor to discuss the issue. It was a frustrating experience. We discovered that abortion has made our legislators silly and irrational.

One usually liberal Congressman explained that when his two year old daughter saw a photo of a zygote in Newsweek, she pointed and said, "Baby, baby." Her father voted against abortion. Another Congressman extolled his love for the little lambs and colts that romped through the fields during his childhood farm years as the reason he could not vote yes on abortion.

Our opposition is highly organized and well financed. They have a telephone network across the country to call in support at a moment's notice. When our Representatives come home, it is these right-to-lifers who greet them at the airport with signs saying "Abortion is Murder."

Women's Lobby has decided that it is time to combat this campaign with one of our own. We are targeting 6 to 10 anti-abortion leaders in Congress for their 1978 elections. Our abortion lobbyist, Carolyn Bode, will go to each district to organize women, talk to the press, and build support. We want to give them a fight they'll remember. So far, we've targeted Rep. Silvio Conte (R, Mass), Rep. Carl Pursell (R, Mich) and Henry Hyde himself.

To do this, we need your support. We have to expand our budget next year, so we need your regular contribution and a special one for this campaign. We also need your suggestions for people in your area who are vulnerable who should be targeted.

The Administration will not help, Secretary Califano will not help, only you can give hope to poor women—and to all women—so we can choose abortion.

CAROL BURRIS  
*President*

## A Letter to the Women's Lobby

Clare Boothe Luce

Your letter of December 19th, asking me for a contribution to the Women's Lobby campaign against anti-abortion Congressional candidates was buried under the Christmas and New Year's mail. It has now surfaced in my in-basket.

Having read it, *I must ask you to drop my name from the Women's Lobby list of sponsors.*

First, I do not care to be identified with a campaign that has already done so much to jeopardize the passage of [the Equal Rights Amendment]. If ERA fails to pass, as I now fear it will, a large part of the blame must fall on those misguided feminists who have tried to make the extraneous issue of unrestricted and federally-funded abortion the centerpiece of the Equal Rights struggle.

Secondly, I do not accept the extraordinary proposition that women cannot achieve equal rights before the law until all women are given the legal right to empty their wombs at will—and at the expense of the taxpayer.

I have been a supporter of ERA for 55 years. Indeed, I went to work in Washington for Alice Paul, the mother of ERA, the year the Amendment was sent up to the Hill.

ERA was conceived as a bill to wipe out, in one single stroke, all the laws on the books which denied equality before the law to women. In the past half-century, women have won many rights they did not have when ERA was dropped into the hopper. But even so, I believe that the passage of ERA would bring the evolutionary process of legal equality to completion.

If the Amendment fails to secure ratification, I very much doubt that Congress will vote to extend it seven more years of grace.

As you are a sincere and dedicated feminist, I owe it to you and the Women's Lobby to explain why I am for ERA and, at the same time, against legalized unrestricted abortion.

As you so well know, all of the democratic liberties and civil rights Americans enjoy under our Constitution—and indeed, the Constitution itself—rest on the validity of a single proposition, which was first set forth in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be

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Clare Boothe Luce, author, playwright, diplomat, and polemicist *par excellence*, is one of the best-known women in America.

self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by the Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Now on what facts or circumstantial evidence did the Signers base this extraordinary—and politically revolutionary—assertion? In 1776, anybody with eyes in his head could see that some were masters, others slaves; some were rich, others poor; some fair of form and sound of limb, others ugly, blind or crippled; some wise, and others fools from the cradle. Nothing in 1776 seemed *less* “self-evident” *in fact* than that “all men are created equal.” And nothing—*in fact*—is less self-evident today.

But “these truths we hold” were not based on evident facts about the human condition. They were based on philosophical and religious *truths* which transcended what people call “the realities.”

The American proposition that created the United States and the Constitution was based—the words of the Signers—on “The Laws of Nature and Nature’s God.”

The Founding Fathers reasoned thus: All men are born equal in one undeniable respect—they are all born equally human. (No man is any less human than any other.) All men have the same nature. It is in the very nature of Man—it is his “human nature” to desire (“among other things”) Life, Liberty and Happiness. (No man naturally desires to die before his time, to be the “creature” or slave of another, or to live a life of suffering or misery.) Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness were “unalienable” rights, because the desire and the need for them had been implanted by Nature, and Nature’s God in the minds and hearts of all men. A government that denied these natural human rights to its subjects was an unjust, unnatural and ungodly government.

Furthermore, our Founding Fathers reasoned, Nature and Nature’s God had also endowed human nature with the capacity to *reason*. Man had the natural capacity to plan, guide and correct his own courses of action. Consequently, the law of Nature and Nature’s God entitled all men to self-government.

I mention all this simply to remind you that the Natural Law (and the Divine Law) is the rock on which the Constitution was founded.

At this point, let me say that the case for the equality of all human beings can be rationally adduced from the Laws of Nature alone. It is not necessary to call on Divine Law or religion, to defend equal rights for women—or to attack unrestricted abortion.

It is a self-evident truth that women are no less human beings than men, and that it is not less in their nature to desire Life, Liberty and Happiness.



Women, being equally human, are equally endowed by nature with the gift of reason. (A gift, by the way, that is best developed in them, as it is in men, by education in the intellectual disciplines.) All this being so, all women are equally entitled with all men to all the rights existing under the Constitution. The purpose of an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution is to guarantee that all women will enjoy these rights.

Now what does the Natural Law have to tell Americans about *sexual equality* and *abortion*?

Well, anybody who isn't altogether an idiot knows that what the Law of Nature has made unequal—or different—neither the laws of men, nor the desires of women, can make equal, or the same.

Men and women, who have the same human nature, have the same instincts for self-preservation. They display the same human (and animal) emotions—fear, hate, love, etc. They have the same procreative urge. They equally desire to “make love” with a member of their opposite sex. It is the Law of Nature that they should “pair-bond” or mate.

But now we come to the stubborn and quite *unalterable fact*. Men and women are biologically different, or not equal, in respect of their reproductive organs and sexual functions. Nature made man to be the inseminator, woman to be the child-bearer. And the Laws of Nature decreed that the natural—and normal—consequence of the love act, or coitus, is the conception in the womb of woman of a new human being, who is “flesh of the flesh and bone of the bone” of both parents. It is natural—and normal—for the woman who conceives to carry her child in her womb to term, to give birth to her, and her mate's baby. Involuntary abortions, or miscarriages, are also natural, in the sense that they are nature's way of expelling naturally unviable fetuses from the womb of the mother. But voluntary miscarriages are not the norm of nature.

It is not the nature of all women to abort their progeny. If it were, the human race would have long since disappeared from the planet. It is natural and normal for women to bring their unborn children to term, and woman has a natural desire to do what nature intended. It is unnatural for woman to interrupt the natural process of pregnancy, in the only way she can do so—by killing the child in her womb.

Induced abortions are against the nature of woman. They are also against the nature of the unborn child, who, like all *living things*, instinctively desires to go on living. (Even a cockroach instinctively tries to evade your lethal foot, and if you half-squash it, tries to crawl away for another second of life.)

*There is no logical process of thought by which the unnatural act of*

*induced abortion and the destruction of the unborn child in the womb can be deemed to be a natural right of all women.*

Induced abortion is against the Law of Nature. There are, to be sure, a great many unnatural things which it is in human nature to desire to do, even though they are against the Law of Nature. And Man, who was also endowed with the gift of free will, does many of them. Sodomy, homosexuality (defined in the dictionary as “unnatural carnal copulation”), adult sexual intercourse with infants, sexual sadism, masochism, are some of the sexual ways in which people go against the Natural Law, which designed the sexes to copulate with their adult opposites.

But of all the human acts that “go against nature,” the killing of a child by its own mother has—throughout human history—been viewed with the most revulsion.

The Supreme Court pointed out in its 1973 abortion decision that “the weight of history is on the side of abortion.” And that is true enough. But the Court failed to point out that the weight of history is not only on the side of abortion, it is even more heavily on the side of *infanticide*. The killing of helpless infants has been practiced in many societies, especially in impoverished, or overpopulated societies. The “weight of history” is also on the side of theft, murder, torture, war, and above all, tyranny. We ourselves are living in one of those tragic eras in history when the “weight of history” seems to be very heavily on the side of a great many obscene, cruel, violent and criminal acts which we would not like to see the Supreme Court legalize simply on the grounds that the “weight of history” is on their side. (If the Founding Fathers, who lived at a time when the weight of history was heavily on the side of tyranny, had followed the reasoning of the Supreme Court, they would have acknowledged the right of King George to abort the birth of America.)

**I**s there no other way to determine the rightness or wrongness of a man-made law than to refer it back to the Laws of Nature? Well, there is what Immanuel Kant called the test of the “categorical imperative.” The philosopher wrote, “There is . . . but one categorical imperative, namely this: *Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.*”

Consider, for example, the act of murder. Hate, fear, greed—the thirst for revenge, the desire for gain, as well as the desire for *justice*, are powerful human emotions that have again and again led people to commit murder. Indeed, the impulse to kill someone who is destroying one’s liberty, or making one’s pursuit of happiness impossible, is probably experienced

sometime in life by everyone. One might argue that as these emotions and desires are natural, the law should recognize everyone's right to commit murder. Why, on the contrary, are laws against murder *universal*? Because anyone with a shred of common sense knows that *to grant a legal right is to recognize it as a right course of action*. But no one in his (or her) right mind has ever willed that everybody should be free to kill his neighbor.

**D**oes the "right of abortion on demand for all women" pass the test of the categorical imperative? If abortion is a right to which all pregnant women are entitled, then it would be right (and not wrong) if all women aborted their fetuses. It would be the right course of action for all women to take. (There's this to be said for universal abortion. It would soon solve all the problems of mankind by ending the human species.)

Obviously, you do not believe—no one can believe—that abortion is a right course of action which *all women* should pursue. What you believe is that there is no danger whatever that all women will abort their children, because you *instinctively* know that it is not only natural for women to conceive, but natural for them to want to bear the children they conceive. And you think (do you not?) that all women have the right—the natural right—to bring their unborn children to term. And you think (do you not?) that anyone who interfered with this right by aborting a woman against her will would be guilty of a criminal action. What you *really think* (if you stop to think), is that *some women, in some circumstances* should be given the right to abort their unborn children, and that for these women, in these circumstances, abortion would be a right course of action.

The great and historic case that men have made against women is that they are incapable of thinking logically. And logic now requires those feminists who believe that abortion is a natural and right course of action for *some women, in some circumstances*, to categorize the women, and describe the circumstances, in which the right to abortion is justified.

At this particular moment of history, the American public (and the Congress) are doing a much better job of *thinking about abortion* than the Women's Lobby.

A recent Gallup Poll shows that only 22 percent of Americans think that abortion on demand should be legal. The Gallup study shows that those who hold this view feel that a human fetus is not a "human being" until the *split second* of its birth.

Only 19 percent think that abortion should be illegal in all circumstances. These believe that the fetus is a human being from the moment of conception, and that abortion is, in all circumstances, "murder."

CLARE BOOTHE LUCE

But 55 percent—the majority—think that abortion should be legal, but only in *certain circumstances*. Of this majority, 77 percent would allow abortion during the first three months, providing the woman's life is endangered by the pregnancy. And 65 percent would allow abortion if pregnancy is the result of rape or incest.

A majority of those who would legalize abortion during the first trimester of pregnancy would disallow it in the second and third trimester, *except to save the life of the mother*.

And only 16 percent think that the fact the parents cannot afford a child is grounds for abortion at any time.

The capacity to think (as opposed to the capacity to “feel”), involves the ability to make distinctions. The American people, God bless 'em, seem to have it, in the abortion question. Clearly, the Women's Lobby doesn't.

I repeat, I wish to disassociate myself from your campaign to purge Congressmen who do not agree with your misguided efforts to make induced abortion a legal, normal and moral course of action for all women in all circumstances.

I do not doubt that these efforts will be repudiated by the American people. What I regret is that they will succeed only in wrecking the chances of ERA.

With kind personal regards—and from Hawaii, the first state to ratify ERA,

Aloha,

CLARE BOOTHE LUCE

## APPENDIX A

*[The following article first appeared in the "Review & Outlook" section of the Sunday, May 18, 1997 issue of The Record, the best-known newspaper in northern New Jersey (locally called "The Bergen Record" after its county of origin). Ruth Padawer is a staff writer for the paper, and an Adjunct Professor at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. (Reprinted with permission of The Record of Hackensack, N.J.)]*

### **Ambivalence enters abortion debate**

*Ruth Padawer*

The first abortion had been easy—the logical choice, Arya figured, for a newlywed like her in a marriage that was already disintegrating. The second followed years later with a different husband, erasing a pregnancy that happened six months earlier than planned. "I used to think abortion was just like squishing a bug," said Arya.

It wasn't until the nightly news began filling with the grisly details of "partial-birth abortions" that Arya started questioning the offhand way she and so many friends relied on abortion—her best friend and sister have each had four, she said. When she admitted her unease to pro-choice friends, some blanched. But others confessed with relief that they, too, held a secret ambivalence.

"It's the kind of thing you don't dare bring up unless you really know a person well, because so many people think that if you question one piece of it, you lose the whole thing," said Arya, a Bergen County mother of three who still supports legal abortion.

That people like Arya are now discussing their misgivings is evidence of a fundamental shift in the national debate over abortion. The Senate is expected this week to vote to outlaw what opponents call "partial-birth abortion"—a term unsupported by physicians and opposed by abortion-rights groups. But the Senate vote is not expected to be large enough to override a promised Clinton veto. A compromise offered Thursday, supported by the White House, would have banned abortions in the final months of pregnancy unless continuing the pregnancy posed a threat of death or "grievous injury" to the mother's health. That was defeated 64-36 in the Senate.

Even with Clinton's promised veto, the campaign against "partial-birth abortion" has been a stunning coup for abortion foes. Deftly, relentlessly, they have directed Americans' attention to the fetus, displacing the discussion of a woman's right to control her body without government intrusion. Even committed advocates have been shaken, with many prompted to voice the moral ambivalence behind their political certainty. It's a discussion that goes beyond discomfort with just one type of abortion.

Until recently, many pro-choice supporters considered such talk traitorous to the cause of women's rights; any crack in the united front, the reasoning went, invited enemy attack. But the fight over this procedure—which the American Medical Association now calls "intact dilation and extraction"—amplified a moral

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unease that for years had been uttered only in hushed tones.

Since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion, technological advances have not only pushed back the point at which a fetus can survive outside the womb, but also offered parents-to-be a shadowy glimpse inside the womb using ultrasound, confirmation that what grew inside was more than just “uterine material.”

Even the stalwart feminist magazine *Ms.* has acknowledged the ethical challenges posed by the recent debate, packing 17 pages of its most recent issue with reflections on late abortion.

“There was a strong sense before that you had to display solidarity,” said Dr. Daniel Callahan, co-founder of The Hastings Center, a bioethics group in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y., and author of two books on abortion ethics. “But it seems there’s an opening now at the grass roots to discuss ambivalence.”

### **Fetus had been ignored**

Certainly, for every abortion-rights supporter voicing qualms, there’s another reaffirming her convictions. But an increasing number of supporters say the fight over “partial birth” has forced them to consider a fetus they had always ignored, raising misgivings that had previously been so vague they were easy to dismiss.

Others say the unease has always been there, but it’s only now that they feel comfortable voicing it. That’s not to say they’re abandoning the defense of legalized abortion. They’re not. But the debate over abortion—if not among pro-choice leaders, then in office hallways and at dinner tables—has incontrovertibly shifted. Some even say the soul-searching is good for the movement; in fact, they say, it may actually be what saves it.

“I now believe that sticking to the old, abstract, neutral, ‘choice’ language is even more endangering of abortion rights than creating a new language that is about ethics and personal responsibility,” said feminist author Naomi Wolf, who set off a firestorm in late 1995 when she argued in the *New Republic* that abortion was a “necessary evil,” and that the pro-choice movement had abandoned a moral framework by denying that “the death of a fetus is a real death.”

“Let’s pray that I’m not wrong about this,” Wolf said recently. “God forbid the discourse changes and we lose *Roe*, I’ll be the first to fall on my sword. But I just feel . . . Americans are smart enough to accept the ambiguities of this and still give women the right to choose to a very reasonable degree, if it’s framed in an ethical way.”

Americans have always seen more shades of gray than abortion’s national warriors like to admit. By and large, they view abortion as a paradigm of competing claims between a fetus and the woman carrying it, a decision with moral implication but not a matter for legal intervention. They are, however, uneasy with the absolutes, and have no qualms saying so.

But in certain circles, being “pro-choice” is shorthand for being “pro-woman,” and admitting ambivalence—about later-term abortions or anything else—is a mark of betrayal.

“We would rather grapple with enemies we know than so-called friends in Wolf’s clothing,” wrote Jane Johnson, a Planned Parenthood leader, in a scathing letter to the *New Republic* in response to Wolf’s essay.

Even before the latest abortion battle, signs of dissent had appeared. Baby boomers who had been on the front lines of skirmishes during the Sixties and early Seventies—and knew how hard-won the Roe victory was—became parents in the Eighties. For some, that experience brought the fetus back into view. In time, pregnancy sonograms became routine. Proud parents-to-be whipped out black-and-white scans of little Johnny at 16 weeks gestation, sucking his thumb in utero. It was hard to reconcile those images with the official line about fetuses being mere “blobs of protoplasm.”

“At our age, we don’t want another kid,” said one Teaneck father nearing 50. “But I’ve seen ultrasound, a baby at 12 weeks with its little heart beating, and that turned out to be Rebecca. It’s hard to imagine aborting that.”

Technology has also pushed back the point at which premature babies survive outside the womb. Arya’s own daughter was born nearly three months early, a mere 1½ pounds; all around her in the neonatal intensive care unit, even younger premies lay tethered to tubes and beeping monitors. It was that image Arya recalled when she heard about “partial-birth” abortions.

“I take my kids out on nature walks and I’m always telling them, ‘Don’t kill that butterfly, don’t squish that worm,’ and then having [my daughter] . . . Certainly a five-month-old fetus is as significant as that butterfly I’m trying to protect.”

“Murky and compromising”

Some pro-choice standard bearers have dismissed such anguish. “Quite apart from blowing up clinics and terrorizing patients, the antiabortion movement can take credit for a more subtle and lasting kind of damage,” feminist author Barbara Ehrenreich wrote in a 1985 essay in the *New York Times*, arguing that moralizing about abortion eviscerated the woman. “It has succeeded in getting even pro-choice people to think of abortion as a ‘moral dilemma,’ an ‘agonizing decision’ and related code phrases for something murky and compromising.”

The fight over the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act accelerated defections from an unequivocal pro-choice position. With detailed illustrations of partially delivered Gerber babies, jabbed in the neck and killed as their brains were sucked out, abortion foes managed to do what noisy clinic blockades and placards of bloody fetuses never could: shake the convictions of many abortion-rights backers. Even pro-choice legislators like Marge Roukema and Patrick Moynihan defected, eventually supporting the ban. This abortion, they said, is just too close to infanticide.

“I’m not sure I ever really thought about it before,” said Laura, a 38-year-old Piscataway writer who occasionally donates money to pro-choice causes. “But when I hear now about pulling the thing apart in the uterus or sucking its little brains out, that horrifies me. I still don’t think I, Laura, should impose my views on anyone else, but I have to say, it makes me feel awful. I know that sounds

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very contradictory, but I guess I feel equally strongly about both those things.”

The reaction by antiabortion activists to all this moral hand-wringing has been mixed. Some welcome it. Others are repelled, believing that the moral pangs actually reflect *less* ambivalence.

“My own distilled version of their position is, ‘All right, they’re human beings, they’re babies if you want to say it that way, but we’re going to kill them anyway,’” said Doug Johnson, legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee, one of the chief lobbyists against “partial-birth” abortions. Pro-choice leaders, he said, rely “heavily on intellectual dishonesty and other kinds of dishonesty, which is deplorable. But I am even more chilled by the coldblooded arguments of those who no longer feel a ‘need’ for such denial mechanisms.”

### **Abortion-rights groups ceded ground**

With the abortion-rights movement under fire, even pro-choice leaders have begun publicly reflecting. The bold cover of the newest issue of *Ms.* announces, “Let’s *really* talk about late-term abortion” and features a roundtable of some of the movement’s leading activists. In it, advocates concede that by deflecting moral concerns over later abortion, the movement has lost followers and ceded important political ground.

“Fear of ambiguity is part of the difficulty in talking about this, but it also stems from the strategic question: What are we going to lose if we admit that there’s ambiguity here? Maybe not as much as we’ll lose if we don’t admit it,” Katherine Hancock Ragsdale, president of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, said in the *Ms.* Forum.

It’s an ambiguity long recognized inside clinics, among nurses and counselors disturbed by repeat patients and late abortions. Administrators from many clinics say they have frank conversations, far from political front lines, about the morality of certain abortions, and how to make peace with the ones that gnaw at them.

“People at the clinics have always been blunt about what they do: doctors who say ‘I can only go up to 14 weeks,’ nurses who say, ‘If you do second trimester, I have to leave,’” said Ron Fitzsimmons, executive director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers, who broke ranks with the pro-choice leadership in February when he said the party line about “partial-birth” abortions being rare and used only for grave fetal anomalies was a lie.

“Look, death occurs in abortion,” said Charlotte Taft, who ran a Dallas clinic for nearly 20 years. “The doctors know it, the counselors know it, the patients know it. The only people who don’t know it are pro-choice leaders. They think the only thing that happened is a ‘choice.’ Yes, it was a choice, but it’s more complex than that.”

Taft, who strongly supports abortion rights, says recasting the debate is vital if the country is ever going to move beyond political bickering: “Society cannot heal from the schism we’ve had over this issue—and the hypocrisy and schizophrenia we have over sexuality and death—unless we talk about what is real.”



## APPENDIX B

[*The following syndicated column appeared in the Washington Times (May 12, 1997) and is reprinted here with permission (© 1997, Creators Syndicate).*]

### Born of a 'choice' not made

*Tony Snow*

The U.S. Senate this week will debate whether to ban partial-birth abortions. There's not much mystery about what both sides will say. Proponents of the ban will call the procedure murder by mutilation.

Opponents, meanwhile, will preach the sanctity of choice. But as they defend the operation this time, they will have to face one unsettling fact. Her name is Donna Joy Watts.

By all rights, the world should know the girl only as a headstone inscription. When her mother was carrying her six years ago, doctors warned that the baby had little or no brain—and briskly packed the parents, Don and Lori Watts, off to see a “genetics counselor.”

The counselor promised to terminate the pregnancy quickly and tidily: A doctor would dilate Lori's cervix, deliver the child feet first, make a neat incision at the base of the skull, suck out the brains and deliver the corpse.

The sickened parents walked away, determined to have their child. Unfortunately, nobody wanted to help them. Like vagabonds, they had to go from obstetrician to obstetrician, until a couple of kindly healers agreed to deliver the baby.

Young Donna Joy Watts entered the world on shaky terms. She was hydrocephalic. Half her brain was missing, including portions that regulate motor skills and such reflex actions as breathing. The remaining tissue was a mess, too. She suffered from partial blindness, seizures and very mild cerebral palsy. Moreover, her sphincter didn't work, which meant the child couldn't swallow.

Doctors decided to pump water into her veins and wait for her to die. But the Watts family refused to play along. They insisted on operations to drain water from the brain and remove a quarter-sized piece of brain tissue from the outer skull.

That didn't help the baby eat, however, and the child couldn't keep formula down. But a hospital error led to a breakthrough. A nurse delivered the wrong meal one evening—rice cereal, baby bananas and formula. Lori mixed the three, cleaned out an available syringe, poured in some of the mixture and began feeding her baby, one drop at a time.

Although the idea runs counter to conventional medical wisdom, it worked. The baby learned to swallow, and for the next year, her mother fed her, drop-by-drop—90 minutes of eating, 90 minutes of rest, 24 hours a day.

Donna Joy grew. At age 18 months, she was moving in a walker and using sign language. But then, as if to prolong the family's Joblike plight, she developed a

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near-fatal infection that wiped out her memory and left her with the intellect of a 4-month old.

Suddenly, she didn't communicate; she threw raging tantrums. She didn't crave her mother's touch. She swung her fists violently. When she wasn't screaming and pounding, she retreated into a private world. She lay on her back, responsive to nobody and nothing.

Just as the family was about to give up, another bizarre turn: One night, her mother inadvertently taped the television show, "Quantum Leap." Upon hearing a song, "Somewhere in the Night," the baby rose, enraptured, only to become a hellion again when the music stopped.

Her mother quickly rewound the tape and played the song. Donna let Lori hold her. In following months, the tune and the sight of series star Scott Bakula led the child out of the darkness, proving that at least one good thing could come out of "Quantum Leap."

Fast forward. Today, five-and-a-half-year-old Donna Joy Watts, the baby with half a brain, can run, talk, recite the alphabet, count, play and annoy her siblings. She functions at very close to the average level for a kid her age. And later this week, she will sit in the gallery as the Senate debates a procedure doctors wanted to use to kill her.

The case for partial-birth abortion has collapsed, and it has been exposed as legalized slaughter. Abortion advocates defend it only because they know that any limit on such procedures establishes a precedent for further restrictions in the future.

Lori Watts couldn't care less. She and her husband, both children of steelworkers, had to overcome the contempt of snobbish doctors and social workers as they painstakingly built their own miracle. They never got any help from feminists, liberal Democrats or the president.

These days, Don works from 4 p.m. to midnight in a local corrections facility so he can spend time with his four kids. Lori educates them in the evening while he's gone. They went bankrupt a couple years ago and moved to a two-bedroom bungalow on a friend's farm.

As for choice, here's what Lori has to say: "Choice? They didn't give me a choice! I had to beg for a choice. Why did I have to go out of my way when they wanted to kill my baby, when they didn't want to operate or feed her? I didn't get to choose anything."

This week, the Senate has a chance to declare that infanticide isn't a choice—it's a crime.

## APPENDIX C

*[The following syndicated column appeared in the New York Post (June 12, 1997) and is reprinted here with the Post's headline and subhead (other papers used different headlines). It is one of a collection of columns to be published this fall (by Scribners) titled The Woven Figure: Conservatism and America's Fabric. It is reprinted here with permission (© 1997, The Washington Post Writers' Group).]*

### Melissa's Choice

*Foremost among the moral tutors who prepared Ms.  
Drexler to act as she did is the Supreme Court*

*George Will*

According to a friend, 18-year old Melissa Drexler paused in front of the mirror in the bathroom to touch up her makeup before rejoining her date on the dance floor at the prom. She had just tossed her 6-pound, 6-ounce baby boy into a trash bin next to the bloodstained stall in the restroom where she had given birth. "She seemed to be enjoying herself," said a classmate about Drexler's postpartum dancing.

Believe it or not, much may depend on whether it can be determined that the baby died before the umbilical cord was cut. Or whether the air sacs in his lungs inflated, indicating that he breathed, however briefly, independent of his mother. Ms. Drexler may be charged with something. Maybe murder. Maybe endangering a child. (Maybe conducting a partial-birth abortion at a prom without a license?)

Who taught Ms. Drexler to think, or not think, in a way that caused her to regard her newborn baby as disposable trash? Many people and things, no doubt.

She may have come from a less than attentive home environment. An assistant prosecutor says family members did not know she was pregnant. She has grown up in a society that does not stress deferral of gratification, and it's not her fault that the baby arrived during the prom, for Pete's sake. She has come of age in a society where condom-dispensing schools teach sex education in the modern manner, which has been well-described as plumbing for hedonists. If she is like millions of other young adults, she has spent thousands of hours watching movies and television programs not designed to encourage delicacy of feelings or to suggest that sexuality has morally complex dimensions and serious consequences. If she is like millions of other young adults, she has pumped into her ears thousands of hours of the coarsening lyrics of popular music.

And she certainly has grown up in a social atmosphere saturated with opinion leaders' approbation of, and collaboration with, the political program of reducing abortion—the killing of something—to a mere "choice," like choosing to smoke a cigarette, only not nearly that serious.

However, foremost among the moral tutors who prepared Ms. Drexler to act as she did is the Supreme Court.

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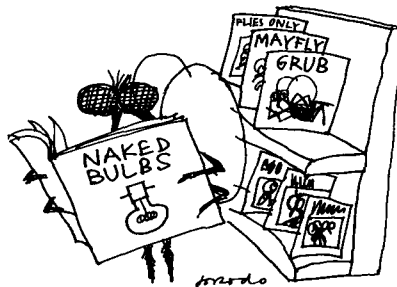
By pretending in *Roe v. Wade* not to know when life begins, the court encouraged looking away from the stark fact that abortion kills something. Ignoring elementary science, the court said, preposterously, that a fetus is “potential life.” But as Walker Percy, an M.D. as well as a novelist, wrote, it is a commonplace of modern biology that a life begins “when the chromosomes of the sperm fuse with the chromosomes of the ovum to form a new DNA complex that thenceforth directs the ontogenesis of the organism.” Percy continued:

“The onset of individual life is not a dogma of the church but a fact of science. How much more convenient if we lived in the 13th century, when no one knew anything about microbiology and arguments about the onset of life were legitimate.”

Biology does not allow the abortion argument to be about, or anyone to be agnostic about, when life begins. Conscientious people can disagree about the appropriate moral and legal status to be accorded the life that abortion ends. But science complicates—to say no more—the “pro-choice” movement’s project of making the world safe for the likes of Ms. Drexler, the project of presenting the ending of an inconvenient young life as akin to a bowel movement.

Pregnancy is a continuum. What begins at conception will, if there is not natural misfortune or deliberate attack, become a child. If it becomes a child at a prom, it must be attacked quickly, lest the whole night be a bummer.

The barbarism at the prom is being termed a “tragedy” calling for “compassion” all around. No, an earthquake is a tragedy. This was an act of wickedness—a wicked choice—and a society incapable of anger about it is simply decadent. Perhaps the brevity of the life of Ms. Drexler’s son will accelerate the transformation of the nation’s vague unrest into a vivid consciousness that today’s abortion culture, with its casual creation and destruction of life, is evil.



THE SPECTATOR 29 March 1997

## APPENDIX D

[The following column first appeared in *National Review* (May 5, 1997) and is reprinted here with permission (© 1997, *National Review, Inc.*). Mr. Novak is a widely known author and commentator on religious, political and cultural affairs; his latest book is *Business As a Calling* (Free Press).]

### Personally Opposed

*When politicians profess personal opposition to abortion,  
the appropriate answer is a question.*

*Michael Novak*

Have you ever nursed the fantasy that you would have the chance to ask certain politicians *one* question face to face?

Well, I have. To all those politicians who begin talking about abortion by saying, “Personally, I’m opposed to abortion but—” I would like to put one question: Can you tell me just *why* you are opposed to abortion? Can you give me just one good argument?

Tucker Carlson lived out my fantasy in an article in *The Weekly Standard* (June 24, 1996). Just as I suspected, the “personally opposed” crowd had nothing defensible to say.

So the public is still left in the lurch.

On no public issue except “choice” is there such a deafening public silence on one side. We constantly hear the arguments for choice. They’re not so hard to understand. (I don’t agree with them, but I understand them.) The argument I’ve never heard is why “choice” is a weak argument, and why the pro-life principle is a strong point of democracy.

The reason why “choice” is not a persuasive argument is that in moral matters the “right to choose” explains nothing. Everyone has to choose; choice is unavoidable. But that doesn’t make particular choices justifiable. A shoplifter can’t say, “I was exercising my right to choose,” and neither can the smoker in a no-smoking zone. The *public* has a right to set rules that deprive the individual of some choices. Stronger reasons than “choice” are needed.

Of course, there is always a legitimate argument about where the public should make rules, and *where* it should not. Some argue that the matter of the beginning of life is at once so intimate and so disputed that the decision should be left to individuals. But there are two serious problems with that argument.

1. Any principle accepted for the beginning of life will logically be applied by the Courts to the end of life. If private citizens can terminate the life of one human being at the beginning, some will claim the same right to terminate the life of another at the end. Some lower courts have already affirmed this right. The practice of abortion will inure minds and hearts to the practice of mercy killing. The delivery of death by private persons at the beginning of life will lead

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to the delivery of death by private persons at the end.

As the consent of the aborted is not even considered at the beginning, so requirements for obtaining consent at the end will be allowed to wobble and grow faint. There will always be passionately argued reasons for killing (relief from intolerable pain; the crushing costs of care).

In short, the boundaries of life and death must be set by public decision. Each of us, at our beginning and at our end, is vulnerable to the choice of others. We need public protection against those others.

This, indeed, was John Locke's argument for the social contract. In the state of nature, humans act like wolves toward one another. They enter civil society through a social contract that takes all acts of violence out of private hands, and entrusts violence exclusively to public authorities, acting through due process. This provides a zone of safety for everyone.

Both in abortion and in euthanasia, private citizens take violence into their own hands and thus violate this social contract. They shrink the zone of civic safety. They weaken civic trust. They set a precedent for other acts of violence.

2. The second problem with asserting a right to choose is that abortion involves treating the other as an object, a thing. We cannot assert that status for ourselves. No one can say, "I'm just an object. Destroy me if you wish." We cannot give away our own human dignity, let alone that of another. Such words could be said, but they would be legally and morally empty.

**T**hose in favor of "choice" (that is, in favor of a regime that puts abortion violence in private hands), usually argue that what is aborted is "not a human person." It is only a "part of the woman's body," they say, or it is "not a bearer of rights." (But some people who argue thus believe that animals have rights.) I don't see how they persuade themselves of such views.

I have heard many pregnant women speak of the "baby" in their womb, even at two or three months. I have never heard a mother say "my fetus."

Spontaneous language aside, what is aborted in the womb is never a cocker spaniel, or a tapeworm, or a body part like an appendix. It is human and only human.

Moreover, from its earliest moments, it has its own individual genetic code, different from that of the mother. It is an individual.

Third, it is always sexed. Its sex is sometimes different from that of the mother but, more often than not, it is a baby girl. It is human, and an individual. This baby girl is also—and will be for some years—quite helpless, and utterly dependent for her survival on her mother and father. (It may take the mother and father more than twenty years to push this child out of the nest.)

These are the reasons why I oppose abortion. I would love to hear the reasons others do. And how those who disagree with me justify to themselves what they wish to impose upon the public.

We need to understand each other better because a compromise, a deal, is not

easy to reach. No one can half-abort.

This issue is like the issue of slavery a century ago. All of us have to reach a public decision together. Regarding slavery, personal choice is not a tenable position; our nation could not continue half slave and half free.

One way or the other, that's how certain matters have to end up. Either we will have a civil society that does not permit individual persons to practice private violence, whether in abortion or euthanasia or other areas; or we will have a society—considerably less civil—that does. The difference is huge.

Such a decision is best arrived at democratically and by way of public argument. It must not be imposed by elites, or by institutions subservient to elites, or in the obscurity and mists, penumbras and prejudices of elites.

Please, let us hear the public arguments. In public. On both sides.

That's my fantasy.



*'Great Scott — a single mummy.'*

## APPENDIX E

[The following book review first appeared in *National Review* (June 2, 1997), which described Mrs. Fielding as “a contributor to the *Human Life Review and Crisis magazine*.” It is reprinted here with permission (© 1997, *National Review, Inc.*.)]

### All-American Girl?

*Ellen Wilson Fielding*

You remember Naomi Wolf. She was the author of a much discussed article in *The New Republic* titled “Our Bodies, Our Souls.” In it she coaxed her fellow pro-choicers to admit that abortion does kill a human being and is usually undertaken for reasons of convenience and therefore could be, may be, might be wrong. She got in some sharp jabs at the self-serving obfuscations of her allies on the Left, but ultimately her efforts petered out into suggestions on how to establish mourning rituals for abortion, while she continued to defend its legality.

That publishing event, and the extensive media reaction to it, happened more than a year ago. Since then Miss Wolf has completed a new project—a kind of autobiographical account of the sexual coming of age of the author and those she grew up with in those promiscuous, post-Pill pre-AIDS days following the sexual revolution. From this she intends to draw lessons about the role and meaning of women’s sexuality, and the way in which girls should be inducted into womanhood today.

In her introduction, Miss Wolf tells us she thought of this collection of sexual anecdotes, recollections, and reflections as the story of “an ordinary American girlhood.” This astonishing statement highlights one of the central flaws of her scheme of exploring how girls became women in liberated 1970s America, for her upbringing was spectacularly untypical.

Naomi Wolf grew up in San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury, the daughter of a leftist professor and a mother whose graduate studies would lead her to examine, among other topics, the dynamics of the San Francisco lesbian community. *Promiscuities* is dedicated to Miss Wolf’s grandmother, “who was a pioneer champion of sex education in a course she taught at the University of the Pacific for many years beginning in the 1950s.”

Miss Wolf describes her childhood friends as coming from assorted Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic backgrounds, but there is no indication that any took religion seriously. When these women complain about being made to feel guilty for their sexual attitudes and desires, they are criticizing Society rather than parents or the local pastor or rabbi. Miss Wolf mentions that her parents were “ethnically Jewish,” and she went to a Zionist summer camp, but the closest she comes to dealing with God’s demands is in describing a rabbi-chaperoned trip to an Israeli kibbutz, where she is rebuked for hanging out with the Irish hired laborers (she becomes sexually involved with one of them, mostly, she thinks, as an act of rebellion).



Though her own parents remain married, her friends' families seem ahead even of the late-Sixties and Seventies divorce curve, with all the attendant collapse of parental involvement and moral energy. What Naomi Wolf's girlhood has to tell us about normal or average girlhoods remains unclear.

But there is a deeper problem, a confusion in Miss Wolf's mind that never resolves itself. On the one hand, she is candid about the parental lapses encouraged by the sexual revolution's preoccupation with self-fulfillment: "Though tolerance, joy, and honesty were real legacies of the freedom of that time, there is no doubt in the minds of my friends and myself that children and parenting fell in value as the exploration of the self and the senses gained in value." She can also see that girls and women were often used in the name of the sexual liberation that was supposed to place them on an equal footing with men. Yet Miss Wolf's focus remains obstinately on the question of whether social mores celebrate and enhance the satisfaction of female sexual desires.

She and the women she interviews talk endlessly about how the "sluts" were differentiated from the "good girls," and how awful it was that girls were made to feel worried or bad about being or appearing sexually advanced. Miss Wolf wistfully describes the temple prostitutes of ancient Babylonia, and the world of the Kama Sutra and of older Chinese erotica that paid tribute to the power of female sexuality and fertility.

But Miss Wolf should seriously consider whether the absorption of herself and her friends in the fulfilling of sexual desires is so very similar to the recognition of ancient societies that fertility and human sexuality are powerful in a sacred, cosmic sense. Those restrictive, patriarchal societies she so dislikes—the Romans with their Vestal Virgins, the Christians with their emphasis on chastity—at least had this in common with the fertility religions: they took sex seriously, as something important and powerful, which had enormous repercussions beyond individual itches or self-absorbed fantasies. For all those multicultural references, Miss Wolf's understanding of the nature and purpose and scope of sexuality is in the end depressingly thin, incurably late-twentieth-century secular American. (She attributes the high divorce rate in part to sexually frustrated wives whose husbands pay insufficient attention to their need for orgasms.)

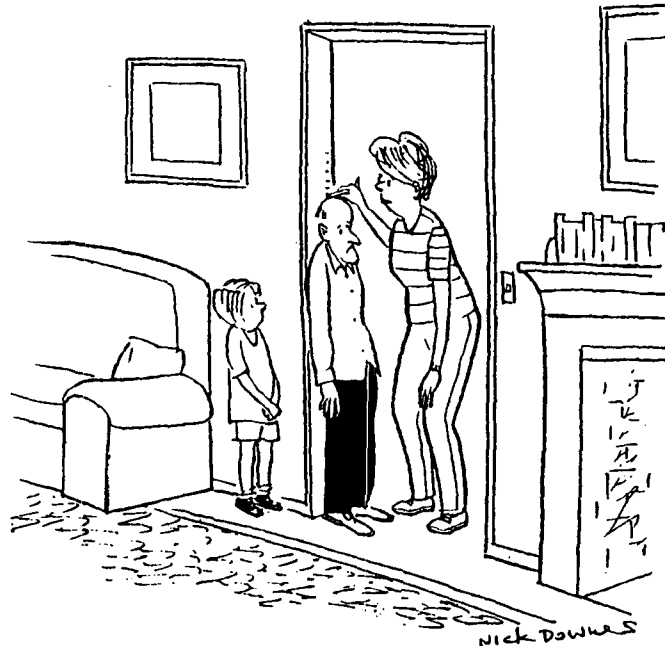
So it is not surprising that in her concluding chapters she tackles sex education in the same old bankrupt secular-liberal manner. Teens can be restrained from early sexual intercourse, with its attendant health dangers, by the Joycelyn Elders method of teaching them all the fun ways of achieving sexual bliss short of intercourse. That Miss Wolf can convince herself that this will postpone the onset of sexual intercourse in teenagers is a kind of tribute, I suppose, to the power of Haight-Ashbury and her grandmother and the romantic dreams they peddled.

In a move that seems borrowed straight from Robert Bly, Miss Wolf and some friends fashion their own female initiation rite, the modern counterpart of

APPENDIX E

African and Indian tribal rituals, suggesting that pubescent girls go on retreats in the wilderness with trusted older women, who can “pass on to the younger everything they have learned about womanhood, and answer *every single question* the girls want to ask.”

However she may imagine that hers was an “ordinary American girlhood,” Naomi Wolf’s coming of age in the heart of the counterculture was anything but. She hopes that something like her experience will become the norm for other, truly ordinary American girls, but we must cross our fingers and hope that her plans and prognostications never come to pass.



*'Goodness, Grandpa — a full inch and a half shorter than last year.'*

THE SPECTATOR 14 June 1997

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