

BRAVE NEW BIBLE: A REPLY TO THE MODERATE EVANGELICAL POSITION ON ABORTION

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For the past fifteen to twenty years a consensus on the issue of abortion has been building in the evangelical community. The consensus holds to a position that can best be described as pro-life: Since the unborn entity is fully human, and since it is ordinarily a serious moral wrong to kill human beings, therefore abortion (which results in the death of the unborn) is ordinarily a serious moral wrong. A significant number of evangelicals, however, oppose the current consensus. One type of opposition, which makes up a small minority, holds to a radical pro-choice position. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott's views are representative of this position,¹ which I have critiqued elsewhere.² A larger opposition group takes a more moderate stance and for this reason poses a more serious challenge to the current consensus. Typical of this opposition is Dolores Dunnett's recent *JETS* article.³ Other evangelicals who have taken positions similar to Dunnett's include Robert Wennberg and Walter R. Martin.⁴

Dunnett defends a position on abortion (which is for the most part shared by both Wennberg and Martin) that cannot accurately be labeled either pro-choice or pro-life. It differs from the radical pro-choice position insofar as it entails that some abortions are not morally justified—for example, those that are performed for reasons of convenience, birth control, sex selection, and so forth. It differs from the traditional pro-life position insofar as it holds that the fetus is not fully human but only a potential human (or person) and hence entails that some abortions other than those employed to save the life of the mother are morally justified—for example, those that take place in the earliest weeks of pregnancy and those that are performed for reasons of rape, incest, severe genetic deformity, and so forth.

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¹ V. R. Mollenkott, "Reproductive Choice: Basic to Justice for Women," *Christian Scholar's Review* 17 (March 1988) 289-296.

² F. J. Beckwith, "Abortion and Public Policy: A Response to Some Arguments," *JETS* 32 (December 1989) 503-518; "Abortion and Argument: A Response to Mollenkott," *Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine* 3 (Summer 1989) 48-56. See also G. Mavrodes, "Abortion and Imagination: Reflections on Mollenkott's 'Reproductive Choice,'" *Christian Scholar's Review* 18 (December 1988) 168-169.

³ D. Dunnett, "Evangelicals and Abortion," *JETS* 33 (June 1990) 215-225.

⁴ R. Wennberg, *Life in the Balance: Exploring the Abortion Controversy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); W. R. Martin, *Abortion: Is It Always Murder?* (Santa Ana: Vision House, 1977).

The purpose of this article is to critically analyze the arguments for this view. Since Dunnett's work is the most recent representative of this position and the one with which *JETS* readers are the most familiar, her paper will serve as my point of departure (although I will refer to a number of Wennberg's arguments).

I. SCRIPTURAL PROBLEMS

In order to Biblically establish her position on abortion, Dunnett appeals to (1) Exod 21:22-25, and (2) the fact that she "finds no Biblical passage that speaks of humans possessing personhood before birth, nor do I find any passage that says abortion is murder."⁵ Let us first examine the latter argument.

1. *The Bible and fetal personhood.*⁶ Dunnett is entirely correct when she claims that there is no Biblical passage that verbally forbids abortion. But this is not relevant to the question of whether the Bible in fact forbids abortion. For example, the Bible does not forbid either computer vandalism or Wall Street insider-trading. If a computer or a stock is somebody's property, however, one can argue that the Bible does in fact morally prohibit both illegal activities under the general precept: "Thou shalt not steal." In the same way, if it is wrong to kill innocent persons (i.e. the prohibition against murder) and if the Bible teaches that the unborn are innocent persons, it follows logically that the Bible in fact prohibits abortion even if the word "abortion" is never mentioned in the Bible. Therefore the real question is whether the Bible teaches that the unborn are innocent human persons. Although Dunnett claims that she "finds no Biblical passage that speaks of humans possessing personhood before birth," there are nevertheless numerous passages that clearly assert the personhood of the unborn. The following passages, I believe, clearly show that the Bible teaches that the unborn are fully human—and my list is certainly not exhaustive.⁷ For purposes of analysis I have divided the texts into four groups.

(1) Many Biblical passages use personal language to describe the unborn from the moment of conception. Genesis 4:1 reads: "Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain." John Jefferson Davis, while commenting on this passage, has observed that "the writer's interest in Cain extends back beyond his birth, to his conception. That is when his personal history begins. The individual conceived and the individual born are one and the same, namely, Cain." For

⁵ Dunnett, "Evangelicals" 218.

⁶ For a fuller treatment of the issue of the Bible, theological arguments and abortion, see F. J. Beckwith, "Theological Arguments for Abortion Rights: A Critical Appraisal," *BSac* (forthcoming October 1991).

⁷ For greater detail and defense of the Biblical case against abortion rights see J. J. Davis, *Abortion and the Christian* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1984) 35-62; N. L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 142-146, 148.

this reason it follows that Cain's "conception, birth, and postnatal life form a natural continuum, with the God of the covenant involved at every stage."⁸

The author of Job 3:3 writes: "Let the day perish on which I was to be born, and the night, which said, 'A boy [*geber*] is conceived.'" This passage is asserting that the person who was born is the same person as the individual who was conceived. "Job traces his personal history back beyond his birth to the night of conception. The process of conception is described by the biblical writer in personal terms. There is no abstract language of the 'product of conception,' but the concrete language of humanity."⁹ Although the Hebrew word *geber* is usually used to describe postnatal humans and translated "male," "man," or "husband" (see Pss 34:9; 52:9; 94:12; Prov 6:34), in Job 3:3 it is translated as "boy" and applied specifically to an unborn human being.¹⁰

Psalms 51:5 states: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." This is another passage asserting that the beginning of one's existence occurs at conception.

(2) Several Biblical passages refer to the unborn in the same way that other passages refer to young children and infants. For example, the word "baby" (*brephos*) in Luke 1:41, 44 is applied to the unborn: "And it came about that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. . . . 'For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.'" But in Luke 2:12, 16 the infant Jesus is called a "baby" (*brephos*): "'And this will be a sign for you; you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger'. . . . And they came in haste and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as he lay in the manger."

(3) The following are a few of the passages that support the view that the unborn are known by God in a personal way: "For thou didst form my inward parts; thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are thy works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from thee, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance, and in thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them" (Ps 139:13-16). "Listen to me, O islands, and pay attention, you peoples from afar: The LORD called me from the womb; from the body of my mother he named me" (Isa 49:1). "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5). "Then the angel of the LORD appeared to the woman, and said to her, 'Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but shall conceive and give birth to a son.' . . . Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, 'A man of God came to me

⁸ Davis, *Abortion* 40.

⁹ *Ibid.* 41.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

and his appearance was like the appearance of the angel of God, very awesome. . . . But he said to me, "Behold, you shall conceive and give birth to a son, and now you shall not drink wine or strong drink nor eat any unclean thing, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God *from the womb to the day of his death*" (Judg 13:3, 5, 6, 7; italics mine).

Wennberg¹¹ has questioned the pro-life use of many of the above passages. First, in reference to those passages that appear to describe the unborn in personal language Wennberg argues that "such references designate individuals not only before birth but before conception . . . , and so they are not really to the point."¹² This criticism, however, is not applicable to all such passages, because some of them do in fact speak exclusively of conception as the beginning of personal existence (e.g. Gen 4:1; Job 3:3). In addition, not one of the passages questioned by Wennberg is claiming that the persons in question existed before their conception but rather that God knew them or had plans for them prior to conception. This is certainly not impossible for an eternal God, who knows all things simultaneously (see Ps 147:5; Job 28:24; Isa 41:21-24; 46:10) and is not bound by space or time (see Ps 90:2; Isa 40:28; 43:12b-13; 57:15a), because he is the Creator of space and time (see Acts 17:25; Col 1:16-17; Heb 11:3; Rev 4:11). In other words, it is certainly possible for God to know each of us "before" we were conceived. Therefore such passages describing God's foreknowledge of us before conception cannot be used to explain away either conception as the beginning of personal existence or that personal existence is attributed to uterine life, especially when the passage specifically says, for instance, that a certain human being either has personally existed from conception (e.g. Gen 4:1) or has personally existed prior to birth (e.g. Jer 1:5; Ps 139:13-16; Luke 1:41-44). Furthermore "conception" or "to conceive" implies a beginning or a genesis, such as when I say, "This is the finest idea you have ever conceived." Therefore when God speaks of a person prior to conception he is not making an ontological claim (a being claim) but an epistemological claim (a knowledge claim). Given these clarifications, the burden of proof is on Wennberg and Dunnett to show us why we should dispense with the more natural interpretation of the above passages.

Wennberg puts forth a second argument:

Extending our examination, it would be a mistake to argue that since it was David who *was being formed* in his mother's womb (Ps. 51:5) it must therefore have been David *the person* who was in his mother's womb. That would be to confuse "formation/creation" of a thing with the "completion/existence" of that thing. The fact is that an entity can be on the way to becoming a particular thing without it being that thing. It is quite natural for us to refer to what is in the process of becoming (the zygote or fetus in a Semite woman's womb) in terms of what it will eventually become (a King David), but we are not then speaking with technical accuracy. If a butterfly *is being formed* in a cocoon, it does not follow that there *is* a butterfly there (rather than a caterpillar or something betwixt or between).¹³

¹¹ Wennberg, *Life* 60-63.

¹² *Ibid.* 62.

¹³ *Ibid.* 63.

According to Wennberg, pro-lifers cannot cite passages such as Ps 51:5 to show the full humanness of the unborn, for such passages are really saying that the person in question is "being formed," not that the human being in the womb has become fully that person.

There are a number of problems with this argument. First, even if we suppose that Wennberg is correct about passages such as Ps 51:5, he would still have to come to grips with other passages, such as some of the ones we have covered above, which unequivocally assert that conception is the beginning of individual personal existence (e.g. Gen 4:1).

Second, Wennberg is guilty of committing the hermeneutical fallacy that James Sire has named "world-view confusion."¹⁴ This fallacy "occurs whenever a reader of Scripture fails to interpret the Bible within the intellectual and broadly cultural framework of the Bible itself and uses instead a foreign frame of reference."¹⁵ The distinction between person and human being, which is employed by Wennberg, has been created by contemporary philosophers who claim that a human being becomes a person at some stage of his or her development either before or after birth. Since it is quite dubious to claim that the author of Psalms, or for that matter any other Biblical book, was aware of this distinction, Wennberg is reading back into David's assertion a foreign worldview.

Third, the passage does specifically assert that "in sin *my* mother conceived *me*" (italics mine). This clearly asserts that conception was the beginning of David's personal existence, because it was at conception that he asserts he was conceived. And if this is true, then it seems logical to interpret the first half of Ps 51:5 ("I was brought forth" or "I was being formed") as describing the subsequent physical development of David in the womb, which continues after birth into infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Although Wennberg is not wrong when he claims that "if a butterfly *is being formed* in a cocoon, it does not follow that there *is* a butterfly there (rather than a caterpillar or something betwixt or between)," the insect that is in the process of becoming the butterfly and will eventually be one is still the same insect that was once a caterpillar. In other words, there is underlying ontological unity to the being in question that makes possible accidental changes of the same substantial being. So it makes perfect sense to say that "this insect was once a caterpillar and now is a butterfly." Likewise, the being at conception is the same person who will become the infant, the child, the adolescent, the adult, and maybe even a theologian. In any event, it is clear that passages such as Ps 51:5 are describing a person who is in the process of becoming, not a thing that is in the process of becoming a person.

(4) It is sometimes forgotten in the debate over the Bible and abortion that there has been a long and rich tradition in Christian Church history, extending back to the early Church fathers, against the practice of abortion. Dunnnett does cite the early Church views¹⁶ but dismisses them as

¹⁴ J. Sire, *Scripture Twisting* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980) 23-30, 127-144.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 26.

¹⁶ Dunnnett, "Evangelicals" 218-220. An excellent book on this topic is M. Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1980).

irrelevant to the Bible's view of abortion: "I would hasten to add that we should regard these views as historical and not necessarily Biblical. . . . We are therefore thrust upon our own ability to use reason and logic because we can glean very little from the Scriptures."¹⁷ But such a dismissal is certainly premature, for the views of the early Church fathers can be extremely helpful in our interpretation of the Biblical text. That is to say, since the early Church fathers were much closer to the writing of the NT than we are today it is reasonable to say that there is a presumption in favor of their interpretation of Scripture and their application of what they believe are its ethical teachings. Of course the Church fathers could have been wrong, but the burden of proof is on those who would bring this accusation against them.

As Dunnett has accurately pointed out, the Christian Church from its very beginnings has held firmly to a pro-life ethic. Some of the early Church authorities who wrote in opposition to abortion (primarily because the act resulted in the death of an innocent human being) are the *Didache* (second century), Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Minucius Felix and Tertullian. Among later figures in Church history who have written against abortion are Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine. Although later Church authorities, such as Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century), under the influence of the erroneous biology of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, disputed as to when the unborn entity receives its soul (Thomas claimed it was at forty days for a male and eighty days for a female),¹⁸ they nevertheless opposed abortion at any stage during prenatal development (though disputing if it was less serious prior to ensoulment), except in the case of when abortion is needed to save the life of the mother. Concerning the Church's historical view of abortion, one study concludes:

For the whole of Christian history until appreciably after 1900, so far as we can trace it, there was virtual unanimity amongst Christians, evangelical, catholic, orthodox, that, unless at the direct command of God, it was in all cases wrong directly to take innocent human life. Abortion and infanticide were grouped together as early as the writing called the *Didache* which comes from the first century after the crucifixion. These deeds were grouped with murder in that those committing or co-operating in them were, when penitent, still excluded from Communion for ten years by early Councils. . . . The absolute war was against the deliberate taking of *innocent* life, not in the sense of sinless life, but in the sense of life which was *innocens* (not harming). . . . We may note that this strictness constituted one of the most dramatic identifiable differences between Christian morality and pagan, Greek or Roman, morality.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid. 218-219.

¹⁸ See J. T. Noonan, Jr., "Aquinas on Abortion," in *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics* (ed. P. E. Sigmund; New York: W. W. Norton, 1988) 245-248.

¹⁹ D. Braine, *Medical Ethics and Human Life* (Aberdeen, 1982), as cited in N. M. de S. Cameron and P. F. Sims, *Abortion: The Crisis in Morals and Medicine* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1986) 29.

Since the early Church was directly spawned by the NT Church, it is safe to say that the interpretation of the Bible through the eyes of the early Church will give contemporary scholars a better idea of what the Bible teaches about prenatal life than relying on contemporary philosophical inventions that are often read back into the Biblical text.

Concerning the Bible and abortion, we can conclude the following: Just as the Bible does not forbid murdering people with arsenic, the Bible does not forbid abortion. But since one can infer that murdering persons with arsenic is wrong from the fact that the Bible forbids murdering in general, one can also infer that the Bible teaches that abortion is not justified from the fact that the Bible refers to unborn human beings as persons and forbids the murdering of persons in general.

2. *Argument from Exod 21:22-25.* One translation of this passage reads (*RSV*): "When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."

Dunnett interprets this passage as saying that "the destruction of a fetus is penalized far less severely than is the killing of the mother. If the mother dies, then a life is given for a life."²⁰ Although she concedes that Exod 21:22 does not deal with voluntary abortion²¹ (as I also pointed out in my article²²), she nevertheless concludes from this passage "that when the 'fetus' becomes a 'child' (= is born), and then becomes a girl, and eventually becomes a pregnant woman, then she is more valuable than as a fetus in the womb."²³

Since I have already dealt with this argument in great detail,²⁴ there is no need to repeat myself. Some brief comments, however, are in order.

First, John Warwick Montgomery expresses concern "as to whether a statement of penalty in the legislation God gave to ancient Israel ought to establish the context of interpretation for the total biblical attitude to the value of the unborn child (including not only specific and non-phenomenological Old Testament assertions such as Ps. 51:5, but the general New Testament valuation of the [*brephos*], as illustrated especially in Luke 1:41, 44)." Montgomery goes on to ask: "Should a passage such as Exod. 21 properly outweigh the analogy of the Incarnation itself, in which God became man at the moment when 'conception by the Holy Ghost' occurred—not at a later time as the universally condemned and heretical adoptionists alleged?"²⁵ The point is that if Dunnett is indeed correct in

²⁰ Dunnett, "Evangelicals" 217.

²¹ *Ibid.* 218.

²² Beckwith, "Public Policy" 512-513.

²³ Dunnett, "Evangelicals" 217.

²⁴ Beckwith, "Public Policy" 512-515.

²⁵ J. W. Montgomery, "The Christian View of the Fetus," in *Jurisprudence: A Book of Readings* (ed. Montgomery; Strasbourg: International Scholarly Publishers, 1974) 585.

her view of Exodus 21, she still must respond to the greater testimony of Scripture itself (see above) in order to establish her position.

Second, even if Dunnett's interpretation is correct, nothing about the full humanness of the unborn entity follows from the fact that a monetary fine is the penalty one receives for accidentally killing it. Concurring with this observation, Bruce K. Waltke writes that "it does not necessarily follow that because the law did not apply the principle of *lex talionis*, that is 'person for person,' when the fetus was aborted through fighting that therefore the fetus is less than a human being." For "in the preceding case, the judgment did not apply the principle of *lex talionis* in the case of a debatable death of a servant at the hands of his master. But it does not follow that since 'life for life' was not exacted here that therefore the slave was less than a fully human life."²⁶

Third, although many scholars agree with Dunnett's interpretation,²⁷ others have called it into question.²⁸ These latter scholars argue that the passage is really saying (in the Hebrew text) that the mother and the unborn are to receive equal judicial treatment—that is, the mother and the unborn are both covered by the *lex talionis*. Most of these scholars argue that Exod 21:22-25 is saying that if the incident in question results in only a premature birth (translated as "miscarriage"), the one who caused it should be fined. But if "harm follows" (that is, if either the mother or the child is injured or killed), the same should be inflicted upon the one who caused it.

In any event, since the interpretation of Exod 21:22-25 is at best divided,²⁹ and since the Bible as a whole teaches that the unborn are persons (see above), Dunnett's use of this passage does not Biblically establish her position on abortion.

II. LOGICAL PROBLEMS IN THE ETHICAL ARGUMENTS

There are several logical problems with Dunnett's article. These problems are found in her attempts to (1) answer the question of when the unborn becomes "fully human"; (2) distinguish "actual" persons from

²⁶ B. K. Waltke, "Reflections from the Old Testament on Abortion," *JETS* 19 (1976) 3.

²⁷ Cf. e.g. R. E. Clements, *Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972) 138; J. P. Hyatt, *Exodus* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971) 233; Martin, *Abortion*; M. Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 181; J. C. Rylaarsdam, "Exodus," in *IB*, 1. 999.

²⁸ Cf. e.g. G. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 246-249; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 275; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Second Book of Moses: Exodus*, in *The Pentateuch*, vol. 1 of *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980 [1864-1901]) 135; M. G. Kline, "Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus," *Simon Greenleaf Law Review* 5 (1985-86) 73-89; Montgomery, "Christian View" 585-587.

²⁹ There is a third interpretation of this verse, defended by both Davis (*Abortion*) and Kline ("Lex Talionis"), two pro-life theologians. Since, however, my main focus is simply to call into question the so-called "pro-choice" interpretation of Exod 21:22-25, it is not necessary for me to bring up yet another view that undermines the pro-choice position.

“potential” persons; (3) defend abortion as a means of eugenics; and (4) indict pro-lifers for lacking compassion and a social consciousness.

1. *When the unborn becomes fully human: life beginning at conception.*³⁰ The traditional pro-life position on abortion has always asserted that full humanness begins at conception, the time at which the mother’s ovum (which contains twenty-three chromosomes) and the father’s sperm (which contains twenty-three chromosomes) cease to exist as parts of their respective owners and together form a zygote. There are at least four reasons why the pro-life advocate believes that full humanness begins at conception. (1) At the moment of conception a separate unique individual, with its own genetic code, comes into existence and, as with the rest of us, needs only food, water, shelter and oxygen in order to grow and develop. The unborn’s genetic makeup was established at conception, determining her unique individual physical characteristics—gender, eye color, bone structure, hair color, susceptibility to certain diseases, and so forth. That is to say, at conception the genotype—the inherited characteristics of a unique human being—is established and will remain in force for the entire life of the individual. Thus like the newborn, the infant, and the adolescent, the unborn entity needs only to develop in accordance with her already-designed nature, which is present from conception. (2) Like the infant, the child, and the adolescent, the unborn (whether it be at the zygote, embryo, or fetus stage) is a being who is in the process of becoming. She is not a becoming who is striving toward being. She is not a potential human life but a human life with great potential. (3) The unborn entity is the sexual product of human parents, and whatever is the sexual product of a particular mammalian species is itself a unique individual member of that species. (4) The same being that begins as a zygote continues to birth and adulthood. There is no decisive break in the continuous development of the human entity from conception until death that would make this entity a different individual before birth. This is why it makes perfect sense for any one of us to say, “When I was conceived.” For this reason French geneticist Jerome L. LeJeune, while testifying before a Senate subcommittee, asserted:

To accept the fact that after fertilization has taken place a new human has come into being is no longer a matter of taste or opinion. The human nature of the human being from conception to old age is not a metaphysical contention, it is plain experimental evidence.³¹

³⁰ For a greater elaboration of prenatal development see the following works, two of which are standard medical-school textbooks: F. Beck, D. B. Moffat and D. P. Davies, *Human Embryology* (2d ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); F. J. Beckwith, “Answering the Arguments for Abortion Rights, Part Three: Fetal Development and Some Decisive Moment Theories,” *Christian Research Journal* 14 (Spring 1991); K. L. Moore, *The Developing Human: Clinically Oriented Embryology* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1977); A. E. Hellegers, “Fetal Development,” in *Biomedical Ethics* (ed. T. A. Mappes and J. S. Zembaty; New York: Macmillan, 1981) 405-409; S. M. Krason, *Abortion: Politics, Morality, and the Constitution* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984) 337-349.

³¹ Subcommittee on Separation of Powers, report to Senate Judiciary Committee S-158, 97th Congress, 1st Session, 1981, as quoted in Geisler, *Christian Ethics* 149.

Hence there is no doubt that the development of a unique individual human life begins at conception. Therefore you did not come from a zygote, you once were a zygote; you did not come from an embryo, you once were an embryo; you did not come from a fetus, you once were a fetus; you did not come from an infant, you once were an infant; you did not come from an adolescent, you once were an adolescent.

Dunnett presents four specific objections to this pro-life view: (1) twinning; (2) the problem of spontaneous miscarriages and the fate of these unborn in the afterlife; (3) the viability criterion; and (4) the argument from cultural convention and human sentiment.

(1) Dunnett points out that "in the case of twins, triplets, and so forth, the cell mass does not separate until six days later." From this she concludes that "if conception is the point at which the soul is present, then a twin would have half a soul, a triplet a third, and so on. I contend, however, that each human being has (more precisely, is) a soul."³² Although Dunnett does not make mention of it, there is another phenomenon known as recombination. This occurs when two zygotes recombine to form one being. Therefore since both twinning and recombination occur prior to implantation, it is argued that individual human life does not begin prior to that time. A careful examination of the nature of twinning and recombination, however, reveals that there is no reason to suppose that the original pre-twinned conceptus or any pre-recombined conceptus was not fully human.

First, scientists are not agreed on many aspects of twinning. Some claim that twinning may be a nonsexual form of parthenogenesis or parthening. This occurs in some animals and plants. Others claim that when twinning occurs an existing human being dies and gives life to two new and identical human beings like herself. Still others claim that since not all human zygotes have the capacity to twin, one could argue that there exists in some zygotes a basic duality prior to the split. Hence it may be claimed that at least in some incipient form two individual lives were present from the start at conception. In any event, the fact of twinning does not seem to be a sufficient reason to give up the belief that full humanness begins at conception.³³ So when Dunnett claims that "a twin would have half a soul, a triplet a third, and so on" if human personhood begins at conception, this makes no more sense than to say that a twin only has half a body. If a complete body can be spawned from a complete zygote, why not a complete soul from another complete soul?

Second, every zygote, whether before twinning or recombination, is still a genetically unique individual who is distinct from her parent. In other words, simply because identical twins result from a zygote split or one individual results from two zygotes that recombine, it does not logically follow that any of the concepti prior to twinning or recombining were not human.³⁴ To help us understand this point, Wennberg provides the following story:

³² Dunnett, "Evangelicals" 220.

³³ See A. Varga, *The Main Issues in Bioethics* (2d ed.; New York: Paulist, 1984) 64-65.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 65.

Imagine that we lived in a world in which a certain small percentage of teenagers replicated themselves by some mysterious natural means, splitting in two upon reaching their sixteenth birthday. We would not in the least be inclined to conclude that no human being could therefore be considered a person prior to becoming sixteen years of age; nor would we conclude that life could be taken with greater impunity prior to replication than afterward. The real oddity—to press the parallel—would be two teenagers becoming one. However, in all of this we still would not judge the individual's claim to life to be undermined in any way. We might puzzle over questions of personal identity . . . but we would not allow these strange replications and fusions to influence our thinking about an individual's right to life. Nor therefore does it seem that such considerations are relevant in determining the point at which an individual might assume a right to life in utero.³⁵

(2) Dunnnett points out that “we must also consider that half of all conceptions are spontaneously miscarried, passing out the next monthly blood loss as a clot. What are we to assume happens to these fetuses in terms of redemption and eschatological habitation? Will the next life include beings that have existed for just a few days or hours?”³⁶

But this is an invalid argument, for it does not logically follow from the number of unborn entities who die that these entities are by nature not fully human. To cite an example, it does not follow from the fact that underdeveloped countries have a high infant mortality rate that their babies are less human than those born in countries with a low infant mortality rate. After all, the mortality rate at the end of life is one hundred percent. Does this make all humans nonhuman?

The fact that Dunnnett finds it difficult to believe that so many of the unborn will populate heaven in the afterlife does not by itself logically rule out the possibility that they will in fact populate heaven in the afterlife. If, after all, the unborn from conception are fully human, it follows logically that they will reside in some heavenly state. Whether or not Dunnnett finds such reasoning psychologically difficult to believe has no bearing on whether the conclusion follows from the premises. She should adjust her sentiments to fit the force of logic rather than dismiss logic to appease the force of her sentiments.

(3) In order to deny the full humanness of the unborn, Dunnnett resorts to the viability criterion:

Another aspect we can investigate is when the fetus is capable of existing on its own outside the mother. It seems that when the fetus is able to live outside the mother it is to be considered a valued, actual human being and not just a potential human being. Actual life takes place, it seems to me, when the fetus is able to survive on its own outside the womb. Therefore until the fetus is able to exist in this fashion it is not considered an actual human being as we would consider the mother to be.³⁷

The fundamental problem with this argument is that it is circular. Dunnnett defends viability—the time at which the unborn entity can live

³⁵ Wennberg, *Life* 71.

³⁶ Dunnnett, “Evangelicals” 220.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 220–221.

outside her mother's womb—as a criterion to determine full humanness because “when the fetus is able to live outside the mother it is to be considered a valued, actual human being and not just a potential human being.” And why is this so? Dunnett responds: “Actual life takes place, it seems to me, when the fetus is able to survive on its own outside the womb.” So only when the fetus can live outside the womb can actual life take place because actual life takes place only when the fetus can live outside the womb. The circle is complete.³⁸

Bioethicist Andrew Varga points out a number of other problems with the viability criterion. First, “how does viability transform the nature of the fetus so that the non-human being then turns into a human being?”³⁹ That is to say, viability is a measure of the sophistication of our neonatal life-support systems. Humanity remains the same, but viability changes. Viability measures medical technology, not one's humanity. As Peter Kreeft writes, viability “varies with accidental and external factors like available technology (incubators). What I *am* in the womb—a person or a non-person—cannot be determined by what machines exist outside the womb! But viability is determined by such things. Therefore, personhood cannot be determined by viability.”⁴⁰

Second, “is viability not just an extrinsic criterion imposed upon the fetus by some members of society who simply declare that the fetus will be accepted at that moment as a human being?”⁴¹ In other words, the viability criterion seems to be arbitrary and not applicable to the question of whether the unborn is fully human, since it is only a criterion that tells us when

³⁸ Dunnett should take heart from the fact that Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun also reasons in a circle while employing the viability criterion in his dissenting opinion in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (57 LW [1989] 5040): “For my part, I remain convinced, as six other Members of this court 16 years ago were convinced, that the *Roe* framework, and the viability standard in particular, fairly, sensibly, and effectively functions to safeguard the constitutional liberties of pregnant women while recognizing and accommodating the State's interest in potential human life. The viability line reflects the biological facts and truths of fetal development; it marks the threshold moment prior to which a fetus cannot survive separate from the woman and cannot reasonably and objectively be regarded as a subject of rights or interests distinct from, or paramount to, those of the pregnant woman. At the same time, the viability standard takes account of the undeniable fact that as the fetus evolves into its postnatal form, and as it loses its dependence on the uterine environment, the State's interest in the fetus' potential human life, and in fostering a regard for human life in general, becomes compelling.” Blackmun tells us that viability is the time at which the state has interest in protecting potential human life because the fetus has no interests or rights prior to being able to survive outside the womb. But then we are told that viability is the best criterion because it “takes account of the undeniable fact that as the fetus evolves . . . and . . . loses its dependence on the uterine environment, the State's interest in the fetus' potential human life . . . becomes compelling.” In other words, Blackmun is claiming that the state only has an interest in protecting fetal life when that life can live outside the womb. But why is this correct? Because, we are told, prior to being able to live outside the womb the fetus has no interests or rights. But this is clearly a case of circular reasoning, for Blackmun is assuming (that the fetus has no interests or rights prior to viability) what he is trying to prove (that the fetus has no interests or rights prior to viability).

³⁹ Varga, *Issues* 62.

⁴⁰ P. Kreeft, “Human Personhood Begins at Conception,” *Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine* 4 (Winter 1990) 12.

⁴¹ Varga, *Issues* 63.

certain members of our society want to accept the humanity of the unborn. From this fact nothing follows concerning the nature of the unborn entity.

Third, "the time of viability cannot be determined precisely, and this fact would create great practical problems for those who hold this opinion."⁴² For example, in 1973, when the Supreme Court legalized abortion, viability was at about twenty-four weeks. But now babies have survived twenty weeks after conception. This, of course, puts the pro-abortionist in a morally difficult situation, for some health-care facilities are killing by abortion viable babies in one room while in another room heroically trying to save premature infants (preemies). It seems only logical that if the twenty-one-week-old preemie is fully human, then so is the twenty-eight-week-old unborn who can be legally killed by abortion. This is why philosopher Jane English, a moderate on the abortion issue (i.e. her position does not fit well into either the pro-life or pro-choice camp, although she seems closer to the latter), has asserted "that the similarity of a fetus to a baby is very significant. A fetus one week before birth is so much like a newborn baby in our psychological space that we cannot allow any cavalier treatment of the former while expecting full sympathy and nurturative support for the latter. . . . An early horror story from New York about nurses who were expected to alternate between caring for six-week premature infants and disposing of viable 24-week aborted fetuses is just that—a horror story." English writes that "these beings are so much alike that no one can be asked to draw a distinction and treat them so differently."⁴³

In addition to the above observations, one can point out that each one of us is nonviable in relation to his environment. If any one of us were to be placed naked on the moon or the earth's North Pole for just a few minutes, one would quickly become aware of one's nonviability. Therefore the unborn entity prior to the time she can live outside her mother's womb is as nonviable in relation to her environment as we are nonviable in relation to ours.

(4) The argument from cultural convention and human sentiment is partially articulated by Dunnnett. It has three facets. (1) Dunnnett points out that we should note "how we treat the fetus at death. If through miscarriage or a stillbirth the Church does not give to it the full status of life in that it is not buried, not named, or not baptized, then 'God had no plan for such a child.'"⁴⁴ Others add: (2) Since our society calculates the beginning of one's existence from one's day of birth, the unborn are not fully human; (3) since parents do not grieve at the death of an embryo or fetus as they would at the death of an infant, the unborn are not fully human.

I believe that there are serious problems with these three points. Concerning the first two, the fact that our society counts one's beginning from one's birthday and that people name and baptize children after their births are simply social conventions by which we acknowledge the unborn's

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ J. English, "Abortion and the Concept of a Person," in *Biomedical Ethics* 430.

⁴⁴ Dunnnett, "Evangelicals" 222. The quotation in Dunnnett's statement is taken from R. F. D. Gardner, *Abortion: The Personal Dilemma* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 127.

“graduation” into society and then the Church. One is not less human if one is abandoned, unnamed, and unbaptized. Some cultures, such as the Chinese, count one’s beginning from the moment of conception. Does that mean that the American unborn are not fully human while the Chinese unborn are? Second, many couples do in fact name, baptize, and have burials for miscarried children. Do these parental actions *ipso facto* make these children fully human while other miscarried infants who have not been treated as such are only potentially human? Third, there is no real essential difference between an unborn entity and a newborn baby, just a difference in location. As Wennberg writes: “Surely personhood and the right to life is not a matter of location. It should be *what* you are, not *where* you are that determines whether you have a right to life.”⁴⁵ In fact, abortion-rights philosophers Peter Singer and Helga Kuhse write: “The pro-life groups are right about one thing: the location of the baby inside or outside the womb cannot make such a crucial moral difference. We cannot coherently hold that it is all right to kill a fetus a week before birth, but as soon as the baby is born everything must be done to keep it alive.”⁴⁶ Third, as Wennberg points out, a newborn chimpanzee can be treated like a human newborn (i.e. named, baptized, accepted into a family), but this certainly does not mean that it is fully human.⁴⁷

Concerning the third point, Noonan has observed: “Feeling is notoriously an unsure guide to the humanity of others. Many groups of humans have had difficulty in feeling that persons of another tongue, color, religion, sex, are as human as they.”⁴⁸ One usually feels a greater sense of loss at the sudden death of a healthy parent than one feels for the hundreds who die daily of starvation in underdeveloped countries. Does this mean that the latter are less human than one’s parent? Certainly not. Noonan points out that “apart from reactions to alien groups, we mourn the loss of a ten-year-old boy more than the loss of his one-day-old brother or his 90-year-old grandfather.” The reason for this is that “the difference felt and the grief expressed vary with the potentialities extinguished, or the experience wiped out; they do not seem to point to any substantial difference in the humanity of baby, boy, or grandfather.”⁴⁹

2. *Distinguishing “actual” persons from “potential” persons.* Throughout her article Dunnett makes a distinction between “actual” persons and “potential” persons, yet her only attempt to present criteria to distinguish these two classes of human beings relies on flawed arguments: twinning, argument from spontaneous miscarriage, viability criterion, argument from cultural convention and sentiment (see above). Therefore Dunnett has no real basis by which to distinguish “actual” from “potential” persons.

⁴⁵ Wennberg, *Life* 77.

⁴⁶ P. Singer and H. Kuhse, “On Letting Handicapped Infants Die,” in *The Right Thing to Do: Readings in Moral Philosophy* (ed. J. Rachels; New York: Random House, 1989) 146.

⁴⁷ Wennberg, *Life* 77-78.

⁴⁸ J. T. Noonan, “An Almost Absolute Value in History,” in *The Morality of Abortion* (ed. Noonan; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1970) 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Moreover, it is doubtful whether it even makes sense to speak of “potential persons.” Those who defend “potential personhood” as a category of human beings seem to be confusing function with essence. If one were to define personhood simply in terms of particular functions (i.e. ability to communicate at a sophisticated level, self-consciousness, sentience, etc.) in order to exclude the unborn, then individuals who are asleep, unconscious, temporarily comatose, or have a temporary flat electroencephalogram (EEG) would not be persons. Furthermore, newborn infants would also fall out of the category of persons, a conclusion for which some philosophers have been willing to bite the bullet.⁵⁰ But no reasonable person would say that any of these individuals are not persons.

Of course, an abortion-rights advocate may want to argue that the analogy between sleeping/unconscious/comatose/temporary-flatliner persons and the unborn breaks down because the former at one time in their existence functioned as persons while the latter, the unborn, did not. Although the abortion-rights advocate makes an important point, he fails to grasp the significant flaw in defining personhood strictly in terms of function, in addition to begging the question (i.e. he is assuming functionalism in his criticism) and ignoring the *prima facie* rights of the newborn infant. For to claim that a person can be functional, become nonfunctional, and then return to a state of function is to assume that there is some underlying personal unity to this individual that makes it intelligible for us to say that the person who has returned to functional capacity is the same person who was functional prior to being in a nonfunctional state. But this would mean that human function is a sufficient but not a necessary condition for personhood. Consequently it does not make sense to say that a person comes into existence when human function arises. Rather, it does make sense to say that a fully human entity is a person who has the natural inherent capacity to give rise to human functions. And since an unborn entity typically has this natural inherent capacity, she is a person. As Davis writes: “Our ability to have conscious experiences and recollections arises out of our personhood; the basic metaphysical reality of personhood precedes the unfolding of the conscious abilities inherent in it.”⁵¹ The underlying unity that remains the same through change and development—from embryo, to infant, to adolescent, to adult—is present from conception. This is why Kreeft writes that “my functioning develops only gradually, but my *me* has a sudden beginning. . . . The pro-choice objection confuses being a person with functioning as a person.”⁵² Therefore because the typical unborn human is a person with a certain natural inherent capacity (i.e. her essence) she will function as a person in the near future, just as the reversibly comatose, temporarily unconscious, newborn infant, and those with temporary flat EEGs will likewise do because of their natural inherent capacity. The unborn are persons who develop and grow, they are not things that develop and grow into persons.

⁵⁰ Cf. e.g. M. Tooley, *Abortion and Infanticide* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983).

⁵¹ Davis, *Abortion* 57.

⁵² Kreeft, “Personhood” 12.

3. *Evangelical eugenics? The quality-of-life argument.* Assuming that the unborn are only “potential” human beings, Dunnnett argues that there are several instances in which abortion is morally justified: to save the mother’s life, when a pregnancy results from rape or incest, and when the child will be born with grave physical or mental deformities.⁵³ The traditional pro-lifer has no problem with the first exception, since an abortion to save the mother’s life results in the rescuing of one human life (the mother’s) when continued pregnancy (or childbirth) will most likely result in the death of two human lives (both mother and offspring). Therefore, since it is better to save one human life rather than to sacrifice two, and the pro-lifer must strive to perform the highest good, abortion to save the mother’s life is morally justified.

Since the unborn are “potential” human beings they do have some value, and for this reason Dunnnett abhors abortion for reasons of convenience, and no doubt also for birth control or sex selection. But since they are not “actual” human beings, the unborn’s right to life can be outweighed by considerations such as “quality of life” and not “letting a bad situation develop and ruin several lives,”⁵⁴ which Dunnnett believes are supported by Scripture (although she does not cite any particular passage).⁵⁵ And since cases of rape, incest, and fetal deformity result in a poor quality of life for expectant mother and/or unborn offspring, abortion in these situations is justified.

Although much can be said in critique of these “exceptions,”⁵⁶ for the sake of brevity I will address one problem—namely, that an appeal to these exceptions to justify abortion begs the question. That is to say, unless one assumes from the outset that the unborn are not fully human it does not follow that these “exceptions” are justified.

(1) That abortion is justified if the child will be born deformed or handicapped begs the question by assuming that the unborn entity is not fully human. For if the unborn are fully human, then to promote the aborting of the handicapped unborn is tantamount to promoting the execution of

⁵³ Dunnnett, “Evangelicals” 224. Dunnnett misleadingly writes that “the laws of our land—and those of other nations—permit abortion in the following areas: when a pregnancy results from rape or incest and there is authoritative certification” (ibid.). This is misleading because the laws of the United States (with the exception of Missouri—i.e. *Webster*) permit abortion for nearly any reason during the entire nine months of pregnancy, which is for all intents and purposes abortion on demand. This is why the United States Senate judiciary committee, after extensive hearings and review of the Supreme Court’s major abortion decisions (i.e. *Roe v. Wade* [1973]; *Doe v. Bolton* [1973]) concluded that “no significant legal barriers of any kind whatsoever exist today in the United States for a woman to obtain an abortion for any reason during any stage of her pregnancy” (Report, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, on Senate Joint Resolution 3, 98th Congress, 98-149, 7 June 1983, p. 6).

⁵⁴ Dunnnett, “Evangelicals” 225.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 222.

⁵⁶ See F. J. Beckwith, “Answering the Arguments for Abortion Rights, Part One: The Appeal to Pity,” *Christian Research Journal* 13 (Fall 1990); “Answering the Arguments for Abortion Rights, Part Two: From Pity, Tolerance, and *Ad Hominem*,” *Christian Research Journal* 13 (Winter 1991).

handicapped people who are already born. But such a practice is morally reprehensible. Are not adults with the same deformities human? Then so too are smaller people. In fact, as I noted earlier, pro-choice advocates Singer and Kuhse, who argue for their position in other ways, admit that “pro-life groups are right about one thing: the location of the baby inside or outside the womb cannot make such a crucial moral difference. . . . The solution, however, is not to accept the pro-life view that the fetus is a human being with the same moral status as yours or mine. The solution is the very opposite: to abandon the idea that all human life is of equal worth.”⁵⁷ Although I do not agree with this conclusion, and have argued against it elsewhere,⁵⁸ Singer and Kuhse make an important observation: The question is not whether a particular unborn entity is physically or mentally handicapped, but whether it is fully human and deserving of all the rights of such a status. And we have already seen that there are excellent philosophical and scientific reasons to suppose that the unborn are fully human from conception.

In light of all this, note the following statement by Dunnett:

A friend of mine recently had to sacrifice a Down’s syndrome child in hope of having a normal healthy child. The malformed child would not have made the bearing of a healthy child possible because of the medical expenses that would have resulted from the birth of the former. The decision was made to abort the malformed fetus. This proved to be a wise decision, because another fetus turned out to be a healthy, beautiful child. *The sacrifice was worth it.*⁵⁹

Dunnett equates this with “compassion, as Jesus taught it.”⁶⁰ But Jesus never advocated, in the name of “compassion,” executing the underprivileged, the physically handicapped, and the mentally disturbed, but went about feeding the hungry (Luke 9:10-12), cleansing the leper (5:12-16), healing the paralytic (5:17-26), and casting the unclean spirit out of the demon-possessed (4:31-37). By implying that the life of a handicapped child can do nothing but result in “a bad situation” and “ruin several lives,” Dunnett is calling into question both the power of God to strengthen us through suffering and our human capacity to attain virtue in the presence of suffering,⁶¹ not to mention the fact that handicapped children have brought tremendous joy and happiness in the lives of many.

Underlying Dunnett’s argument is a fundamental confusion between the concept of finding a solution and the concept of eliminating a problem. For example, one can eliminate the problem of poverty by executing all poor people, but this would not really solve the problem, since it would directly conflict with a basic moral truth that human beings should not be gratuitously exterminated for the sake of easing economic tension. This

⁵⁷ Singer and Kuhse, “Handicapped Infants” 146.

⁵⁸ See Beckwith, “Public Policy”; “Answering the Arguments for Abortion Rights, Part Three.”

⁵⁹ Dunnett, “Evangelicals” 224 (italics mine).

⁶⁰ Ibid. 223.

⁶¹ See S. Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1987).

“solution” would undermine the very moral sentiments that ground our compassion for poor people—namely, that they are humans of great worth and should be treated with dignity regardless of their predicament. Similarly one can eliminate the problem of having a headache by cutting off one’s head, but this is certainly not a real solution. Therefore Dunnett’s argument is superfluous unless she can first show that the unborn are not fully human and hence do not deserve to be the recipients of our basic moral sentiments. Philosopher and bioethicist Baruch Brody comments:

In an age where we doubt the justice of capital punishment even for very dangerous criminals, killing a fetus who has not done any harm, to avoid a future problem it may pose, seems totally unjust. There are indeed many social problems that could be erased simply by destroying those persons who constitute or cause them, but that is a solution repugnant to the values of society itself. In short, then, if the fetus is a human being, the appeal to its being unwanted justifies no abortions.⁶²

(2) By presupposing that the unborn are not fully human, the argument from rape and incest begs the question. For if the unborn entity is fully human, then we must weigh an innocent human being’s right to life against the relieving of the woman’s mental suffering. But relieving one of emotional distress never justifies homicide. Although a difficult judgment, it should not be forgotten that the same innocent unborn entity that the career-oriented woman will abort in order to guarantee a salary increase is neither biologically nor morally different from the unborn entity that is a result of rape or incest. And since abortion for salary increase is a serious moral wrong if the unborn entity is fully human, neither can it be justified in the cases of rape and incest, because in both cases abortion results in the death of an innocent human life. As Bernard Nathanson has written: “The unwanted pregnancy flows biologically from the sexual act, but not morally from it.”⁶³ Hence this argument is successful only if the unborn are not fully human.

Some abortion-rights supporters claim that this position lacks compassion, since it forces a woman to carry her baby against her will. But this is not true. It is not the pro-lifer, but the rapist, who has forced the woman to carry her child. The goal of the pro-lifer is to make sure that another innocent human being (the unborn entity) is not victimized by another violent and morally reprehensible act (abortion). For two wrongs do not make a right. Michael Bauman has made the observation: “A child does not lose its right to life simply because its father or its mother was a sexual criminal or a deviate.”⁶⁴ Bauman also points out that in using the rape/incest argument the pro-choice advocate is making the highly questionable assumption that the rape victim is the one best suited to administer

⁶² B. Brody, *Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life: A Philosophical View* (Cambridge: M. I. T., 1975) 36-37.

⁶³ B. Nathanson, *Aborting America* (New York: Doubleday, 1979) 238.

⁶⁴ M. Bauman, “Verbal Plunder: Combatting the Feminist Encroachment on the Language of Religion and Morality,” paper presented at the forty-second annual meeting of ETS, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, November 15-17, 1990, p. 16.

justice and should be permitted to kill the criminal's offspring. But if the unborn entity is fully human (which is the real question in the abortion debate), abortion is not the sort of "justice" reasonable people have traditionally thought of as justice, for "a civilized nation does not permit the victim of a crime to pass a death sentence on the criminal's offspring. To empower the victim of a sex offense to kill the offender's child is an even more deplorable act than the rape that conceived it. The child conceived by rape or incest is a victim, too. In America, we do not execute victims."⁶⁵ Bauman concludes:

Because ours is a government of laws and not of men, we must not consign justice and morality to the pain-beguiled whims of victims. They, of all people, might be the least able to render a just verdict or to identify the path of highest virtue. I am convinced that the more monstrously one is mistreated, the more likely it is that revenge and personal expedience will look to that person like goodness. While rape victims most certainly know best the horror and indignity of the crime in question, being its victims does not confer upon them either ethical or jurisprudential expertise. Nor does it enable them to balance the scales of justice or satisfy the demands of the moral imperative with care, knowledge, finesse, or precision. If one was an uninformed or inept ethicist or penologist before the crime, as most of us undoubtedly are, being a victim does not alter that fact at all. Justice is traditionally portrayed as blind, not because she was victimized and had her eyes criminally removed, but because she is impartial. Rape victims, like all other crime victims, rarely can be trusted to be sufficiently impartial or dependably ethical, especially seeing that they so often decide that the best alternative open to them is to kill the criminal's child.⁶⁶

4. *Pro-lifers, compassion and social consciousness.* Dunnnett claims that "in the pro-life movement great attention is given to life in the first nine months, but little afterwards."⁶⁷ This assertion is not only false but also commits the *ad hominem* fallacy. Several comments are in order.

Dunnnett seems to be implying in her argument that unless the pro-life advocate is willing to help bring up the children she does not want aborted she has no right to prevent a woman from having an abortion. But this is a bizarre principle on which to base moral action. For one thing, it begs the question by assuming that the unborn are not fully human. Would we not consider the murder of a couple's children unjustified even if we were approached by the parents with the following offer: "Unless you adopt my three children by noon tomorrow, I will put them to death"? The fact that I may refuse to adopt these children does not mean that their parents are justified in killing them. Thus it all depends on whether the unborn are fully human.

Second, as I mentioned in my previous *JETS* article on abortion, think of all the unusual precepts that would result from the moral principle in question: Unless I am willing to marry my neighbor's wife, I cannot

⁶⁵ Ibid. 16-17.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 17.

⁶⁷ Dunnnett, "Evangelicals" 222.

prevent her husband from beating her; unless I am willing to adopt my neighbor's daughter, I cannot prevent her mother from abusing her; unless I am willing to hire ex-slaves for my business, I cannot say that the slaveowner should not own slaves. Although I believe that the pro-life movement as a whole does have a moral obligation to help those in need, especially unwed mothers, the point I am making is that it does not logically follow from this moral obligation that abortion *ipso facto* becomes a moral good simply because individual pro-life advocates are not currently involved in such a ministry (although they probably tithe to churches that do support such ministries).

Finally, pro-lifers do care about people after they are born. For one thing, there are scores of ministries dedicated to helping unwed mothers.⁶⁸ Second, the typical pro-life advocate is involved with many community activities in addition to pro-life activities. This is borne out in the results of an informal survey of the most active members (229 persons) of the Indiana Right to Life Organization, a typical state group:

- 81 distributed food and clothing
- nearly one-fourth donated blood regularly
- 37 worked in support groups (drugs, alcohol, suicide)
- 17 worked in programs for abused women
- 28 worked in hospitals, clinics, and hospices
- 38 worked in volunteer fire and police departments and neighborhood associations
- 116 worked in scouting, youth work and meals on wheels
- 176 worked in schools: tutoring, aiding teachers, etc.
- 67 worked in voter registration
- 52 worked in political campaigns
- 100 worked in Sunday schools
- 45 worked in a crisis pregnancy phone line
- 75 worked distributing maternity and infant clothing
- 47 have shared their homes with pregnant strangers, elderly, refugees, sick, or foster children.⁶⁹

In conclusion, Dunnett's position on abortion is flawed both Biblically and logically. Although other criticisms about her article could be raised, they would not be germane to the position she is defending.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Among the many organizations that help unwed mothers and women in crisis pregnancies are Crisis Pregnancy Centers (branches are found in many cities across North America), Pregnancy Crisis Center (Virginia), and Bethany Lifeline (1-800-234-4269). See the interview of the administrator of an Assembly of God adoption agency in "Alternative to Abortion," *Pentecostal Evangel* (February 11, 1990) 14-15.

⁶⁹ R. A. Hanley, "Do Right-to-Lifers Care Only About the Unborn?," *The Communicator* (Indiana Right-to-Life newsletter) 5/5 (June 1980) 2, as quoted in J. T. Burtchaell, *Rachel Weeping: The Case Against Abortion* (San Francisco: Harper, 1982) 129.

⁷⁰ For instance, Dunnett misrepresents N. Geisler's abortion position. She relies on Geisler's ethics textbook, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), which defends an abortion position similar to hers. But since the publication of this book, which has been out of print for a number of years, Geisler has altered his views and now holds a traditional pro-life position. His subsequent writings have made this unequivocally clear (see e.g. his *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* [1989]).