

life matters

After-birth abortion?

It's rare that anyone pays attention to bioethicists, but in February of 2012, a pair of them set off an Internet firestorm by saying newborns could be killed for almost any reason. Alberto Guibilini and Francesca Minerva wrote "After-birth abortion: why should the baby live?" in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*.¹

That cynical question implies that explanations are now owed for any child who lives more than a few days or weeks beyond birth. The authors didn't detail how long the killing is acceptable before it should be called "murder," or suggest discrete methods of bringing about the demise of an infant. They only wanted to apply pro-choice arguments to what has previously been called "infanticide."

What changes at birth? In their view, a newborn is more like a fetus than a child, so "killing a newborn could be ethically permissible in all the circumstances where abortion would be." An abnormality may have been missed in prenatal testing, or the mother's circumstances may have altered. Should her baby's birth prevent her from carrying out now what would have been legal days or months before?

Pro-life apologists have also wondered what changes at birth, to the opposite effect. Since the baby who is born is the same person who was in the womb, there is no essential difference and the unborn baby should be protected along with the newborn.

Polls show that most people – even those who are pro-choice – agree that viable unborn babies (age 24 weeks or more) ought to be protected by law.² Birth is only a change in venue, not value. And the value of human life is inestimable.

Guibilini and Minerva's idea, however, is that an individual must meet certain standards before being deemed a person worthy of protection. "Merely being human is not in itself a reason for ascribing someone a right to life."

They admit "it is hard to exactly determine when a subject starts or ceases to be a 'person'" but go on to say it's anyone who has "formed any aim." This could mean the individual knows the loss of life would prevent accomplishment of aims, has an idea of self, or attaches a value to his or her own life. If none of these things are true, then supposedly death poses no harm.

What is man?

For them the value of a human life is not intrinsic – just because he or she is human and, therefore, made in God's image – but depends on reaching a certain level of mental development.

This is far-removed from how the Bible describes a human being. Look at how Psalm 8 describes man: Someone God thinks about and visits; a little lower than angels; crowned with glory and honor; given dominion over animals, birds, and fish; people who responds to God in praise – even from infancy!

Newborn babies are precious, representing hope and the ongoing promise of life. We rightly look upon them with wonder at God's gift, no matter the circumstances surrounding their births. Should we now look at them with suspicion, as a terrible menace?

The authors do. They say, "having a child can itself be an unbearable burden for the psychological health of the woman or for her already existing children," and "[a] serious philosophical problem arises when the same conditions that would have justified abortion become known after the fact." But the

only people who have a problem are those who believe . . .

- God has no concern or design for the individual
- Life is mainly biological, not spiritual
- Neither an unborn fetus nor a newborn are persons
- Death can be in a disabled child's best interests
- Adoption can be more harmful than death

People reacted to this article with angry surprise, but it really didn't say anything new. Abortion, abandonment of infants ("exposure"), and direct infanticide have been common from ancient times. Although not spoken of in the Bible, the early church knew these practices were forbidden. In *Sanctifying Life in the Early Church*, David P. Gushee writes, "for Christians, the child's life too, was sacred, even in the womb and in infancy, as was the life of the woman carrying the child. For both Jews and Christians, abortion and infanticide were absolutely banned."³

Guibilini and Minerva conclude that, "since non-persons have no moral rights to life, there are *no reasons* for banning after-birth abortions." It's an ethic that can be traced to the Nazi-era creed that said some lives are "unworthy of life."⁴ But ultimately it reflects the Enemy's aim of attacking the image of God.

Read more @ <http://www.lifemattersww.org/Portals/0/Documents/AfterBirthAbortion.pdf>.

1. *J Med Ethics*, 2/23/2012, jme.bmj.com/content/early/2012/03/01/medethics-2011-100411.full. 2. Gallup abortion poll (1996-2011), www.gallup.com/poll/1576/abortion.aspx. 3. DP Gushee, "Sanctifying Life in the Early Church," The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity, cbhd.org/content/sanctifying-life-early-church. 4. RJ Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*, www.holocaust-history.org/lifton/LiftonT021.shtml.

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