many improvements could be made to it, because it applies to conduct within our society. But that is not the question.

I have been struck increasingly by the extreme positions that have been taken on the question of abortion. There is, I suggest a "groceteria" approach to conception. That approach is known as "abortion on demand". That position is symptomatic of the condition of our society in which too many want convenience above all else. An endorsation by this House of the "store-front" approach to abortion would be a major step backward for this country. That would be questionable, especially from the standpoint of how we value human life.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): The other extreme that many of us have witnessed could be described, I suppose, as the "fetus über alles" approach. Those advocating this approach are prepared to sacrifice all for the fetus, the physical and mental health of the mother, of the family, and perhaps of the unborn child. They do not mind if the child is to live a life of discomfort and misery. The rights of the fetus are above all. I submit that this position is as tyrannical as the one advocating abortion on demand.

A strange aura surrounds this question and many suggestions introduced as arguments are irrelevant. One argument that you hear quite often from those who advocate abortion on demand is that, after all, since the fetus is in the body of a woman she should have the right to determine whether she should give life or not. My answer to that argument is that I have not known of any women who became pregnant all by themselves. Pregnancy is not the result of one person's act. It does not occur because a person suddenly says, "I think I will now become pregnant." It arises in most instances out of a social relationship.

Some hon. Members: Oh oh!

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Usually, it is one that is cemented by a bond resulting in permanent union. That being so, how can someone who says that the individual has the right to determine whether or not the fetus shall live overlook certain basic responsibilities and feelings of the individual who shared in the act of conception and who has related responsibilities to other members of the family and to the community? This whole question must be looked at in some kind of balance and taken in its totality. There is a danger of our losing sight of that fact in this discussion.

The basic question which cannot be ignored is, when does life come into being? There is no agreement on this. How much easier it would be for our discussions in this House and elsewhere if we could say when the human fetus is recognized as an individual and unique human being. It is fair to say that the largest religious community in this country, the Roman Catholic church, has been most outspokenly opposed to suggestions that the abortion law be liberalized. I have in my hand a copy of the brief which the Canadian Catholic Conference submitted

to the special committee of this House on abortion in 1968. They state as follows:

—it is difficult to determine the exact moment when we can be certain that the fetus is human.

That statement is true not only from the standpoint of their ethical and religious position but also from the standpoint of medical science. The basic difficulty, as we all admit, is that we have not arrived at any commonly agreed position as to when human life begins. I would also argue that there is as much danger in our spending too much time on this question as there is in ignoring the larger question, the question that must be obvious to members who are concerned about the health of society generally. I am talking about the value of life itself. That is why as a member of the House I have become increasingly alarmed about the dogmatic positions taken by a number of people in the country.

Anyone who argues that abortion should simply be a matter of the individual's whim ignores some important questions. Think, for instance, of the difficult position in which this might place doctors. Let us say that on a certain afternoon a patient walks into a doctor's office and says, "Doctor, I am so many weeks pregnant. I believe I should not have this child and I want an abortion as quickly as possible." Being busy, the doctor probably will not spend too much time going into the reasons for her request and he will perform the abortion. Then a few days or a few weeks later we might see the same woman coming into the doctor's office and saying that she feels unhappy and disappointed now because she has decided that after all she wanted the child. That would not only be ridiculous; it would be tragic. Obviously, some reasonable mechanism must be set up for dealing with the question. It will not be dealt with if we simply ignore the question by erasing from our statute books existing laws on this subject.

A large proportion of people in this country probably agree that the present law touching abortion is unsatisfactory. But you will not get better law by having no law, and that seemed to be the argument presented in the chamber this afternoon. One of our major difficulties in this country is that we do not know accurately how many abortions take place. A number of different authorities have suggested that perhaps upward of 100,000 women in this country have recourse to illegal or completely unsafe abortion procedures which sometimes bring tragic results and often cause the unnecessary death of innocent women. That problem, surely, cannot be overlooked, no matter what position one takes on this question.

Quite frankly, I think that federal and provincial governments have displayed a major shortcoming in the past few years because they have been either unable or unwilling to gather sufficient information on this question. With such information, Members of Parliament and members of legislatures could bring forward better laws and better procedures than exist at present. I participated in an extensive series of hearings on this question almost three years ago. Time and again when we tried to make definite decisions with respect to