

Embryology Authority Runs Amok, Tries to Kill Child

The Powers That Be are in a shameful state of moral confusion about embryos and stem cell research and all that sort of thing.

Take the case of **James Harry Whitaker** for example:

James Harry Whitaker was born on Monday after being genetically matched, while still an IVF embryo, to his four-year-old brother Charlie, who has a rare form of anaemia.

His parents Jayson and Michelle had to travel to the United States after UK authorities refused to give them permission for treatment

[...]

The [Human Fertility and Embryology Authority] defended its decision not to allow treatment, however. A spokeswoman said the outcome of the Whitaker's case would be considered as evidence for a future review of guidelines, but it was unlikely to lead to immediate changes in the authority's policy.

She said: "We have to look at the benefit for the embryo, not just the sibling. Perhaps some day in the future our policy will change. But at the moment we have to be quite strict in the way we issue licences, on a case-by-case basis, and looking at the scientific, medical, and moral issues before making any decision.

But what she really means is that they are *refusing* to take into account the moral issue, and are taking refuge in sticking to the Regulations, however odious and immoral. If a four-year-old child is thereby condemned to death, well, they are only following orders so they can't be doing anything wrong, right? And *maybe they'll change their policy some day in the future!* What kind of a moral defence is that, for killing a child?

"There is clear guidance. HFEA policy states that women are allowed to have treatment only for the benefit of the embryo. It is a tough decision to make."

The HFEA said Charlie's case differed from that of Zain

Hashmi, whose parents were granted permission to screen a new baby to save their son, because Zain's rare blood condition was hereditary.

The authority said in the Hashmi case the potential child was at risk from the disease, but in the Whitaker case, the primary purpose of the child would be as a donor and the child was at no extra risk of contracting the disease Charlie had by virtue of being his sibling.

So, just to make this clear: the British government's policy is that it is all right to have Child 2 via IVF and embryo-selection in order to try to save Child 1 from a horrible life-threatening disease if and only if there's a significant risk that Child 2 might get the same horrible life-threatening disease. However, if there is no such risk then the parents are *not* allowed to select Child 2 in order to save Child 1.

Take a deep breath and consider the Alice-in-Wonderland-type non-logic of this position. In the case where the parents could end up with two children with the disease, the treatment is deemed to be right. In the case where at least one child definitely won't have the disease it is deemed to be wrong. So wrong as to justify letting a child die for lack of it. If the policy were the other way round the government might have a point, but this is just insane.

The argument for it is supposed to be that it is wrong to have the embryo undergo a medical procedure that is not for his benefit without his consent. But first, embryos that do not yet have brains cannot think and so cannot give or withhold consent, nor can one get a person's consent to bring them into existence. As we said, if the procedure in question involved a significant risk to the 'saviour sibling' (as they are known in this field), there would be a moral issue here, but all the actual procedure involves is taking cord blood that would just have been thrown away anyway.

So this is an issue over which the US authorities are saner than the British ones. Note also that the American Medical Association seems to be **sensible** too – they support allowing stem cell research. Anti-abortionists object to such research since it involves small clusters of cells that come from dividing egg cells that might otherwise develop into people. Presumably since masturbation or contraception kill millions of sperm that might otherwise develop into new people, they are morally equivalent to mass murder. **All together now:**

Every sperm is sacred.

Every sperm is great.

If a sperm is wasted,

God gets quite irate.

Sun, 06/22/2003 - 14:45 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

You know...

As a pro-choicer with many friends and loved ones who are pro-life (most of them female), I get rather weary of the tired old "well aren't sperm and eggs human too?" chestnut. If you can find a pro-lifer on the planet who believes that, I'd be shocked.

There is a perfectly reasonable moral position that human life begins at conception--one which can be constructed on entirely non-theistic grounds, in fact, and there are a number of atheist pro-lifers. I tend to believe that, even in jest, rhetoric like yours here tends to make reasonable people roll their eyes rather than really think about the issue.

I think a lot of people interested in putting forward stem-cell research would get a lot farther if they stopped treating their opponents as irrational boobs and fools. It may be emotionally satisfying but I'm not sure it's going to get the results you want.

by a reader on Mon, 06/23/2003 - 15:40 | [reply](#)

The status of sperm

There is a perfectly reasonable moral position that human life begins at conception--one which can be constructed on entirely non-theistic grounds

So, please tell us what it is, briefly. Then we'll understand why pro-lifers shouldn't believe that sperm are sacred.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Mon, 06/23/2003 - 19:00 | [reply](#)

Human Life -- The Prequel

Though the sperm is a nonviable product, and the egg is much the same, the sperm-egg combination is both viable and genetically distinct from either of its parents. Accidents and deliberate molestations notwithstanding, it will mature into recognizably protected human life. There is no qualitative change along the way that separates the zygote from the baby it will eventually become.

Aristotle would have had something to say here about "essence versus accident."

Now, before anyone puts words in my mouth, this is not an airtight case for banning all abortions. Among other considerations, that question must account for the enforceability of such a law, the cost of enforcement in terms of other rights sacrificed, and the loss of respect for all law that would follow if it were widely violated without penalty, as we have good reason to believe it would. (E.g., Brazil, which has the strongest anti-abortion laws in the world, suffers more than 1,000,000 abortions per year, by conservative estimates.)

However, it is a strong case against the deliberate creation of

zygotes and embryos for the purpose of sacrificing them for the benefit of others.

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Mon, 06/23/2003 - 21:31 | [reply](#)

Or an alternative...

Would it be possible for sperm to be considered sacred while also acknowledging the fact that they typically do go to waste? Like, 99.999% (not sure how many nines to put there) of the time?

You can consider rain to be sacred without wishing to bottle up every drop of it that might hit infertile ground, after all. It's possible to respect the raw materials of life without taking it to Catholic levels.

Not that that's important, really... just remarking.

Stem cell research issues are different from pro-life issues in a subtle but essential way. You can go back and forth on whether or not a fetus is a human being for ages without coming to a definite conclusion, but you do need that definite conclusion before you can go creating a market for fetuses. Saying, "It's not human because we reeeeeally need it," is probably not going to work.

In a way, abortion actually makes the stem cell debate more difficult. If the only available fetuses were the ones lost naturally, then the few who raised a ruckus over them would be ignored. Sort of like that pesky medicinal marijuana issue: it wouldn't be a problem to legalize it if only people wouldn't keep getting high off the stuff. ;)

- Ewin

by a reader on Mon, 06/23/2003 - 21:45 | [reply](#)

Only a loon loves a spermatozoon

Though the sperm is a nonviable product, and the egg is much the same, the sperm-egg combination is both viable and genetically distinct from either of its parents.

Why is a lone sperm not viable, does it not thrash its tail with great purpose and competently carry its unpaired chromosomes?

If that doesn't persuade, why not rewind to the point where the successful sperm is *just* about to plink through the outermost membrane of the giant ovum. Here we have a viable physical system that's genetically distinct from the mother. But that description also applies to her chocolate labrador. In fact, until the fertilised egg has anchored to the womb wall, her chocolate labrador is *more* viable (assuming she remembers to feed it). And every time a virile man passes a fertile young woman on the street there are trillions of genetically distinct and viable sperm-egg combinations within a 3-metre radius. Are they then morally obliged

to go out for dinner that evening?

enforceability of such a law ... the loss of respect for all law that would follow if it were widely violated

Isn't the law to do with morality? Don't people want to be moral?

Would it be possible for sperm to be considered sacred while also acknowledging the fact that they typically do go to waste? Like, 99.999% (not sure how many nines to put there) of the time?

Not really. What if the Archbishop of Canterbury decided to dynamite all England's cathedrals except York Minster? Everyone in the Church of England would hate him, even the Bishop of Reading.

Sacred just means extremely valuable. It's used by some people because they're not allowed to value something unless it's loved by a supernatural being first. Something is either valuable to you or it isn't. I need water to survive. However, a particular raindrop would only be valuable to me if I was both about to die of thirst *and* I happened to pipped to the ground in exactly the right place at 3:17pm face up with my mouth open, etc.

There are some things that are supposedly sacred but in practice are not treated that way. For example, a scrawny cow wandering around a Delhi slum, chewing on cardboard.

If sperm are sacred they should all be frozen in sperm banks by law until some time in the future when we've constructed sperm paradise.

Saying, "It's not human because we reeeeeally need it," is probably not going to work

Has anybody actually said that?

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 06/24/2003 - 18:38 | [reply](#)

Where Does The Line Fall?

Your word games are rather silly, Tom. An individual sperm cell or ovum has no claim to anyone's indulgence. Unless sperm and ovum are mated under specially supportive circumstances, neither has a chance of ever acquiring the human status that would entitle it to rights. A purposive act committed under a narrow range of conditions is required to form a human zygote.

BUT... once the sperm and ovum have been allowed to form a zygote, you DO have a creature that, in the absence of violence or accident, would develop to human status. To create a human zygote for the purpose of killing it is to treat it as indistinguishable from a meat animal: a support to human life with no independent significance.

Here's a clarifying question: Imagine that the zygote was allowed to

mature beyond the usual few days at which stem cells are extracted from it. I think you'll grant that after 18 years, we'd all concede that the result possessed a right to life. Probably most of us would grant it a lot sooner. So when does that right actually attach to the developing zygote... embryo... fetus... baby... toddler... preteen... "Dad, can I borrow the car tonight?"

We're not talking about a "regular" gestation here, so the usual legal dividing line of emergence from the mother's body is absent. What age, event, or other discrete consideration would cause this creature to acquire a right to life? What is the qualitative change that brings about personhood?

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Tue, 06/24/2003 - 22:07 | [reply](#)

Re: Where Does The Line Fall?

Curmudgeon:

"once the sperm and ovum have been allowed to form a zygote, you DO have a creature that, in the absence of violence or accident, would develop to human status."

Does a sperm-egg pair immediately prior to conception satisfy this criterion or not?

by [David Deutsch](#) on Tue, 06/24/2003 - 22:45 | [reply](#)

sigh

Okay, some facts (even if rule #32 of "Rules of abortion debates (derived from calvinball rules)" states "It is *halal* to weigh the facts cited by anti-abortionists as equal to the facts cited by pro-choicers.")

Sperm and Eggs are technically called gametes, and are said to be haploid, meaning that each has exactly one half of the genetic complement necessary for a human being. Neither is in a position to even multiply: Eggs are specialized cells, and the number that a female has are fixed while still in the womb. Sperm are generated by a process known as **meiosis**, a specialized form of cell division that results in cells having half the genetic complement of the original, which WAS a normal cell, and which are incapable of further division. Without the capability of division, they cannot multiply and sustain an organism themselves. Both are of human origin, with DNA that can be clearly identified as being human in origin. If not, then how else could authorities, using sperm samples from a raped woman, be able to positively identify her assailant? Conversely, several convicted "rapists" have been freed when DNA analysis of the sperm samples proved that the sperm didn't come from them.

But is the combination, before union and merging of the DNA, a

human? Alas, the very question betrays an earnest effort on the part of Mr. Deutsch to avoid the implications of the subsequent fusion which not only DOES have a full compliment of provably human DNA, but starts dividing and growing as if there was no tomorrow. This is done by insisting that pro-lifers have a focus that they do not possess, being an accusation that neither the author of this topic, nor the other supporting commenters thereof, have proven or demonstrated. Instead, a ditty from a non-prolife web site is uttered: It rhymes. It supports an unproven accusation tailored to ignore the facts and divert attention away from the interesting sleigh of hand that subtly changes the discussion from that of embryos, to eggs, to sperm, as if to imply that all are the same thing. Thus, TRUTH has also been uttered.

Hasn't it?

yeah, riiiiight.

The question is also rather pointless: ALL human beings alive today have come about by the fusion of a definite egg and a distinct sperm that FORMERLY were separate. If this obvious fact is supposed to raise suspicions about the humanity of those destined to be aborted, it also should raise suspicions about the humanity of those **not** aborted. It seems to me that the distinguishing characteristic between those that are aborted and those who are not, does not lie in the method of conception that ALL human beings share.

I am quite sure that, if one looks long and hard enough, you will be able to find a web site or some wild preacher who supports the sentiment that "sperm are sacred". Of course, I am way ahead of you already, since I have, quite providentially, already discovered a pro-abortion website whose authors and commenters demonstrate an abysmal knowledge of human biology that could only be explained by them having failed Sex ed in high school. They actually don't know the difference between sperm, eggs, and embryos! Can you imagine that? If they know so little about human biology, what makes them think they know anything about what God thinks about sperm, eggs, and growing embryos, much less about what He thinks about a practice that discriminates against a human being based on their age and possessing a **temporary** physical disability?

Back to the topic at hand. The incident cited is pretty much a demonstration of the failure of socialized, government run medicine. In such a structure, there are NO insurance companies doing screening for appropriate "interventions", so the government has to do the screening, so as to preserve resources for the truly needy, and not waste them on hypochondriacs. The confusion of the author is understandable, since it would involve entertaining the, probably astounding, concept that the **fetus is a patient**. If a fetus has a problem, then intervention is justified: if it helps someone else, then that's a bonus. But the fetus does not have a problem, then it does not qualify **as a patient**. Medical intervention is not required. Authorization denied.

Sure, the fetus can be a donor, but the rules currently require that

the donor give their informed consent. As with everything else, an exception to these rules has to be raised with respect to fetuses. If this exception is not honored, then **The Basis For Abortion Is Mortally Threatened, And We Cannot Have That, Can We?** (*nudge* *nudge* *wink* *wink*)

Unfortunately, if one has to consider the fetus as a patient of a human doctor, then it just might be because it itself is a human, deserving of patient rights. No one less than Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a staunch **promoter and defender of abortion rights** changed his opinion on abortion when he became a professor of pre-natal care and was forced to consider the implications of regarding beings he used to butcher as his patients!

I am not surprised that this thought did not occur to the editor: I am currently writing a conjecture **at my website** that postulates the possibility that pro-abortionists suffer from a fundamental inability to process the concept that a fetus is a human being "created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights," to the same extent and with the same efficiency as the concept that "a woman has the right to choose to kill an unborn human being." (yes, yes, I know the standard line is supposed to be that she has a right to choose an abortion. I took the liberty of substituting the definition of abortion in place of the word itself. That IS the definition of Abortion, isn't it? When it comes to **setting the world to rights**, clarity of definition and the eschewing of euphemisms would be helpful, no?)

Ugh, I forgot to sign up. My Nom-d'internet is Ptah Aegyptus, e-mail ptah at sixies dot net .

by a reader on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 02:09 | [reply](#)

Abortion

Ptah Aegyptus wrote:

Sperm and Eggs are technically called gametes, and are said to be haploid, meaning that each has exactly one half of the genetic complement necessary for a human being. Neither is in a position to even multiply: Eggs are specialized cells, and the number that a female has are fixed while still in the womb. Sperm are generated by a process known as meiosis, a specialized form of cell division that results in cells having half the genetic complement of the original, which WAS a normal cell, and which are incapable of further division. Without the capability of division, they cannot multiply and sustain an organism themselves.

No one is disputing that fetuses have distinct human DNA. That would be rather absurd. The debate is not over the facts, but rather the moral implications of the facts. "A fetus is a person" simply does not follow from "fetuses have unique human DNA that can develop into a person unless it is aborted". If it did, then it would convince people who think that abortion is wrong if and only if fetuses are

people. Since it doesn't, additional arguments are necessary.

Ptah Aegyptus also wrote:

Can you imagine that? If they know so little about human biology, what makes them think they know anything about what God thinks about sperm, eggs, and growing embryos, much less about what He thinks about a practice that discriminates against a human being based on their age and possessing a temporary physical disability?

Before humans had discovered the difference between sperm, ova, and growing embryos, was it wrong to have a position on abortion? If so, was it then wrong to oppose abortion?

~Woty

<http://woty.davidsj.com>

by **Woty** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 03:04 | [reply](#)

Uh huh. Yeah...

Woty wrote:

No one is disputing that fetuses have distinct human DNA. That would be rather absurd. The debate is not over the facts...

Really? *takes another look at the initial topic and the subsequent comments, eyes big as saucers* Hmph. Sure fooled me. However, I will leave it to the judgment of the truly inquiring and open minds who will come after, read this topic and the comments, to decide if I could be forgiven for having taken literally the confessions of ignorance as to the differences between sperm, eggs, and embryos, or demonstrations indicating the lack of knowledge thereof.

but rather the moral implications of the facts. "A fetus is a person" simply does not follow from "fetuses have unique human DNA that can develop into a person unless it is aborted". If it did, then it would convince people who think that abortion is wrong if and only if fetuses are people. Since it doesn't, additional arguments are necessary.

Ah yes, the "human being is not a person" distinction, made sacred by the bald assertion of 7 old men in a building in Washington DC in 1973. Actually, the statement that "persons have unalienable rights" is equally in the same position: it depends on who sets the definitions, and whether there is a physical reality to "unalienable rights", on the same level as physical things and actions such as "human beings" and "abortion". Those things and actions can be pointed at and discussed without self-serving ambiguities. Retreating to a position deliberately rife with ambiguities is a good

defensive position, but does not lend itself to being regarded as a

person wanting to make a moral decision.

A bit of history: when the Dred Scott case was decided, **Chief Justice Taney made a distinction between persons and citizens**, ruling that Dred Scott couldn't sue for his freedom because he wasn't a citizen, and thus **had no standing to sue**.

When the 14th Amendment was added, the authors deliberately chose the word "person", instead of "citizen", precisely to avoid Chief Justice Taney's self-serving, artificial, loophole creating, distinction. No doubt, after it passed, they slapped the dust off their hands and thought smugly, "There! THAT problem won't come up again!"

And darned if, a century later, the Supreme Court went and did it AGAIN!

sighs Oh well, I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised that a society that vitally relies on the loophole creating assertion that "A human being is not a person", would eventually wind up with a debate on "what the meaning of the word 'is' is," should I?

But don't think that this charade hasn't been noticed.

Woty wrote:

Before humans had discovered the difference between sperm, ova, and growing embryos, was it wrong to have a position on abortion? If so, was it then wrong to oppose abortion?

Let's be blunt: Abortion is supported because it solves a set of problems posed by a woman who has an unwanted pregnancy that would come home to roost the moment the "fetus" (greek for "unborn child" BTW) becomes a born fetus.

Some more history: The set of problems arising from an unwanted pregnancy have existed since time immemorial, with abortion being the most modern "solution" that is deemed the "cleanest", most "sanitary", and "socially acceptable" alternative to the previously practiced solution of **infanticide**. Some cultures and societies accepted it as a valid solution to the aforementioned set of problems, and allowed its practice. Others did not. As a culture, we (apparently) decided it was "wrong", and chose to neither practice it nor tolerate its practice. (Before the development of the partial birth abortion method, the preferred method for aborting pregnancies beyond 8 months involved performing a C-section, removing the "product of conception", and leaving it squalling in a bucket in the operating room. Nurses were fired for raiding said buckets and taking said refuse to be adopted. In my mind, the distance between that and infanticide is **not** spacious.)

Alas, the problem of unwanted pregnancies, eventually resulting in the appearance of inconvenient human beings, still remained. It doesn't seem to matter to some that over 99.99% of the persons in the world are human beings. Extend the definition to 100%? Oh no!

Can't have that! An exception **must be raised** when it comes to

the human Fetus, and if this exception is not honored, then the Moral Basis For Abortion Is Mortally Threatened, And We Cannot Have That, Can We? (*nudge* *nudge* *wink* *wink*)

Ptah

by **ptah** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 14:02 | [reply](#)

Confused (yet again)

I don't understand what this whole thing is about. Aren't the 2 children alive and well? I'm confused. So they had a baby designed to be as genetically close as his brother so they could use cord blood to save him, what does that have to do with abortions? Or am I missing something?

Also, how come sperm is the same thing as an embryo? And you forgot to mention menstruation, but they didn't make a song out of it :D

Leo,
<http://eraserewind.blogspot.com>

by **Leo** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 15:34 | [reply](#)

Moral divide over moral dividing line.

Ptah wrote:

An individual sperm cell or ovum has no claim to anyone's indulgence. Unless sperm and ovum are mated under specially supportive circumstances, neither has a chance of ever acquiring the human status

An individual zygote or uterus has no claim to anyone's indulgence. Unless zygote and uterine wall are mated under specially supportive circumstances, neither has a chance of ever acquiring human status.

To create a human zygote for the purpose of killing it is to treat it as indistinguishable from a meat animal

The purpose of an unwanted pregnancy is not to terminate the foetus, the unwanted pregnancy is typically a byproduct of poor contraception. The original purpose was simply to make whoopee.

What does it mean to consider that whatever makes a human being important as a human being is present in a small cluster of cells? It means that a mature conscious human being is indistinguishable from a meat animal. It also brings much real misery into the world in countries where abortions are illegal or hugely frowned upon.

We don't yet agree on where the moral dividing line can be drawn. According to child psychologists long-term memory doesn't set in until the age of two. Thank goodness *they're* not in charge.

by **Tom Robinson** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 15:52 | [reply](#)

blinks

Tom Robinson quotes:

Ptah wrote:

An individual sperm cell or ovum has no claim to anyone's indulgence....

I beg your pardon, Mr Robinson? Please check your references before posting, sir, for it was fporretto you quoted, not I.

And I suggest considering the differences between the categories of *kind* and *degree*. At least Woty agrees that, in principle, there is no difference in **kind** between a zygote and an octogenarian, in that they are the same *kind* of being. Terms such as zygote, embryo, fetus, baby, child, toddler, pre-teen, teen, and adult are terms of *degree*, distinguishing between stages of physical development driven by time. To look at an embryo and complain "it doesn't look like a human being to me!" is to be misled by appearances. We allowed science to disabuse us of the notion, when we looked up at the sky, that we were the center of the universe: "Look at how they all go around US!" Its about time we allowed science to disabuse us of other superficial notions as well.

I agree with your statement in one respect: The human zygote (being human by possession of human DNA, by the way, and thus does not need to "qualify" for that distinction) has many hurdles to leap before it meets the artificial criteria set forth to qualify for protection under the law as a more privileged "person". It is one thing for it to fail due to possessing genetic flaws or being unable to attach to the uterine wall, or some other NATURAL hurdle that ALL pre-born human beings must surmount. It is quite another for it to be proceeding along swimmingly, only to be premeditatively terminated to **prevent it from qualifying** under the artificial criteria now in vogue separating certain human beings from more "privileged" persons, and for reasons which, if appealed to when "premeditately terminating" a "person", would land them in jail. Or the electric chair.

BTW, blowing away a competitor who's threatening to qualify to run a race is clearly illegal, but am I the only one who has the nagging feeling that it's unsporting as well?

Ptah

by **ptah** on Wed, 06/25/2003 - 17:15 | [reply](#)

Interaction counts.

Sorry to Ptah and to Fporretto for my quotation error above.

Ptah,

Yes, the fertilised egg and the eighty-year-old person that it

develops into are the same kind of thing in terms of DNA. They are different stages of the same biological organism. However, they are not the same kind of thing from a moral perspective.

The moral status of something should not be based on what it might or probably will eventually become but on what it actually is now (including perhaps a record of its history). The point about abortions and stem cell research is that we can safely and effectively *change* what embryo cells can become.

It seems super-unlikely that a small lump of cells can think, hurt, make a choice, perceive colour, anything like that. The philosophy of mind emanating from *The World* accords with Karl Popper's theory of knowledge which implies that a mind develops by trial and error. For this trial and error to get underway you need ongoing interaction with a rich environment perceived by well-developed sense organs. Not much (in any) of this has happened before birth.

It's not so much

it doesn't look like a human being to me

It's more like

it doesn't *interact* like a human being to me

We don't yet have agreement on where to draw the line. The pro-lifers' DNA argument puts the line way too early. This wouldn't matter so much except for the fact that much conspicuous evil results from the sperm-meets-egg starting line or the related "ensoulment" idea. And also because we might be able to do so many good things with embryonic stem cells and by pre-screening frozen embryos. I don't see why we shouldn't eventually allow ourselves to alter germline DNA. Immunity to AIDS spliced in?

by **Tom Robinson** on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 00:52 | [reply](#)

Monkeys Are "Potential Humans"

Rocks too, btw. They just need to be effected in just the right way. If you're confused, there's a quote something like: practically anything can be a computer if you shine the right kind of light on it. and of course the being effected could involve re-shaping the rock, adding stuff, etc...

if you claim adding stuff is not allowed, i'd insist that an egg and sperm wouldn't be able to get larger in size w/out adding stuff from outside themselves. if you claim design is not allowed, well it's not impossible, just unlikely, with rocks and monkeys.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://curi.blogspot.com/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 01:49 | [reply](#)

"...from a moral perspective": Tom Robinson

Moral perspective? MORAL PERSPECTIVE?

sighs

Well, I suppose, since the debate no longer revolves around what is now acknowledged as the known facts, that **some** progress has been made. However, you sounding a trumpet call to move the debate from the clear, sunny fields of known facts into the dark, boggy swamp of post modern American morals, where the only belief that certainly will be voiced, once within, will be the belief that nothing is certain, informs me that you do not share my opinion that we are making "progress".

sighs again

Well, if you **insist**.

Oh by the way, before we commence...

By what right, by what code, by what standard?

VOICE it, sir. Voice the particulars of the "moral" code that you are using to decide what is right and wrong in this debate. If we are to run into a swamp, hoping to lead others after us, let us at least demonstrate the quality of our maps and compasses to those who put their trust in us, so that they may decide if the paths have a chance of leading to light, rather than into an infestation of alligators.

All in favor of avoiding the alligators, fall in over there by the tree. All not in favor, please go back home to mommy before you hurt yourselves.

At the risk of being tedious and lengthy yet again, I shall assert mine.

I hold that, within the context of a **secular** society, that Human Life is the supreme value, and is the criterion upon which all other morals, laws, practices, beliefs, and behaviors, are to be judged. While I do not deny the existence of other values worthy of pursuit, I hold that, within the context of a secular society, they are LESSER values, and MUST YIELD as subservient when their pursuit involves the injury or death of another human being. Instead, they form a hierarchy, some more important than others, but with their status determined by the degree to which they advance and support the supreme value of Human Life. To believe that there exists some other value, moral, law, practice, belief or behavior as being higher than human life means that, in the event of conflict, that human life must yield, and may be taken if necessary for the sake of the higher value. I hold that the only thing worth killing for is to support the DIRECT preservation of Human life.

All in favor of the death penalty **only** in the case that human life is taken, and not when the violator has offended some practice, belief, behavior, or a person's finances or material "quality of life", please follow me.

I hold that *all men are created equal, that they are endowed by*

their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. Based on this, and understanding that the rhetorical use of the word "men" is shorthand for all members of the human race, I assert that the definition of a "lesser class" of human being is that they possess **fewer rights** than the "privileged class". For **all** humans to be created **equal, each** human must possess the **same** rights. This is not rhetoric. This is not opinion. This is Mathematical Set Theory. Any **mis**-distribution of rights is, by definition, discriminatory.

All in favor of **all** human beings having the **same** rights, please follow me.

However, I DO NOT hold that all discrimination is wrong. All issues of right and wrong are based on whether the society's key values are violated or upheld. In American society, a form of discrimination based on age is logically, yes necessarily and enthusiastically, pursued. Laws are passed excluding young members of the society from certain activities and duties, as well as prohibiting older members of the society from certain behaviors toward the young that would be otherwise permissible and defensible. These laws, invariably, can be demonstrated as having the goal of **protecting the life of the young**, in **deference to** the supreme value of Human Life, but in clear **opposition to** the important, but definitely lesser, value of "liberty". Nevertheless, society rightly deplors discrimination, and so all these laws have strict time limits to ensure that this discrimination is not a permanent feature in individual lives, and that "paternal laws" are not imposed on those who require no parents. So important is this principle that many bad laws are passed using the ruse that it "protects the young".

All who normally oppose discrimination, but favor a time limited form of discrimination in order to ensure that **the young are protected until they are ready to protect themselves**, please follow me.

Not a complete list, but a good start. The remainder won't make sense until we're in the swamp and at a fork in what passes for a path through it.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 16:30 | [reply](#)

Crossing the line

Ptah wrote:

"I hold that, within the context of a secular society, that Human Life is the supreme value, and is the criterion upon which all other morals, laws, practices, beliefs, and behaviors, are to be judged. While I do not deny the existence of other values worthy of pursuit, I hold that, within the context of a secular society, they are LESSER values, and MUST YIELD as subservient when their pursuit involves the injury or death of another human being. "Instead, they form a hierarchy, some more important than others, but with their status

determined by the degree to which they advance and support the supreme value of Human Life. To believe that there exists some other value, moral, law, practice, belief or behavior as being higher than human life means that, in the event of conflict, that human life must yield, and may be taken if necessary for the sake of the higher value. I hold that the only thing worth killing for is to support the DIRECT preservation of Human life."

What counts as a human being? It can't simply something that's alive and has human genetic material, if it was blowing your nose or scratching your arse, both of which kill cells would be morally equivalent to mass murder. So what is the relevant criterion?

Well, let's think about this. Suppose that an AI were created by running suitable software on a silicon based computer with an architecture close to that of the human brain and that it was capable of having conversations, learning new things and so on. Would you feel comfortable with pulling the plug on it? I am going to presume that the answer to that question is no. It follows that the class of things one is allowed to kill is not dependent on biology but instead on thinking.

There is no particular reason to suppose that embryos think while they are in the womb and many reasons to presume otherwise. These include things like it would not be evolutionarily advantageous to think before leaving the womb, babies being very stupid when they pop out and so on. Whether this specific theory about when the child thinks or not is true is debatable, but there must be some point between conception and when the child starts to talk when the baby starts thinking before that point it is not a thinking person, after that point he is. Correspondingly the child's moral status changes after crossing that line, before it crosses the line it doesn't count morally, afterward he does.

One last thought experiment, one of the molecules that enables stem cells to grow into any kind of cell has been discovered. Sooner or later advances like this will make it possible to turn any cell into any other kind of cell and at some point we'll be able to turn any cell in the body into a new human being. Based on your policy of taking measures to make sure that any cells that are biologically human and could be grown into people are grown into people there are two responses to this. Either, we must force everybody to have cell samples taken and made into human beings at the maximum rate that can be done without killing them. Or we must stop the development of such technology. In either case we will be forced to turn the West into a closed society. Which policy should we adopt?

by [Alan Forrester](#) on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 18:17 | [reply](#)

Don't worry folks...

THIS won't take long.

Mr Forrester, let's do another thought experiment.

You scratch your arse.

NOW you scratch your boss's wife's arse.

Moral: the difference is only DNA.

Another thought experiment.

You shoot yourself.

NOW you shoot your bo-

Uhhh, skip that.

However, the difference is still only DNA.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Thu, 06/26/2003 - 22:29 | [reply](#)

What, Me Worry?

Ptah,

Your reply to Alan indicates to me that you didn't understand his comment.

His point is that DNA does NOT make the person, and you persist in asserting that it does.

If you and your boss' spouse were identical twins with identical DNA, it would still make a difference whose ass you scratched because you'd be different people!

A person is not DNA. A person is a *mind* that can grow knowledge. A bunch of cells that might someday become a person is not a person yet.

by [Gil](#) on Fri, 06/27/2003 - 23:48 | [reply](#)

Oh really?

Gil, I shall leave it to other readers, with a more questioning and impartial frame of mind, and who will bother to read ALL the posts AND who possess a memory to remember them between the time they start the page and the time they reach YOUR comment, to decide if I ever claimed that DNA was a person. It is to accuse me of ignorance of biology. Again, I will leave it to those other readers to decide who REALLY knows, demonstrates, and attempts to argue based on a knowledge of biology, and who does not.

Did YOU bother to read BOTH posts? I invited ALAN, a male, to scratch a female's arse. DNA would be the way to determine if the cells under his fingernails was his or his boss's wife's. I did not say, as you imply I claim, that his Boss's wife is now under his fingernails. And it is a known fact that identical twins are of the same sex. *Reducto ad absurdum* works against the question only if you show that MY supporting argument is contradictory by being absurd, not if you use the *Straw man fallacy*, assert I used different

premises (identical twins),
and THEN prove the resulting argument as absurd. Nor has Alan disproven the proposition that a zygote is deserving of the same protections as adults despite its stage of development by *Reducto* by merely DECLARING it absurd: The question of whether it is absurd or not is implied by the argument under question. Declaring it absurd and then claiming to have disproven it via *Reducto* is itself the fallacy of *Arguing in a circle*.

While on the subject of *Reducto*, I point out that, when responding to the proposition that a human zygote (fertilized egg) is deserving of the same protections as an adult human being (which, in the current legal environment is a synonym for being a "privileged" person),
it is NOT proving contradiction or absurdity to say that the **logical consequence** will be that it will be required that all human eggs and all human sperm MUST be joined into human zygotes. The question revolves around how a human zygote should be treated **after** it is created, not the irrelevant (and purposefully distracting) question of whether a human zygote is to be created in the first place, and whether failing to so is a violation of the rights of a human being that doesn't yet exist. For the record, I personally have no problems whatsoever violating the dignity, rights or sanctity of the minds or bodies of nonexistent human beings, and will vigorously defend the right of existing human beings to do the same against non-existent human beings.

However, just because you don't see it, doesn't PROVE that it doesn't exist. Hell, in science, sometimes even SEEING it **still** doesn't prove that it exists!

(And don't pull a dowsism by quoting my statement and removing "nonexistent" from the sentence. I don't think anyone here is that big of a prick, but don't disappoint me, please.)

While on the meta-subject of proof, I should point out the predilection of using the word "person" instead of "Human being" upon which you and others insist upon. Before *Roe Vs. Wade*, if you had bothered to ask anyone on the street, they would have said that the two were synonyms for the same set of human beings. The Supreme Court did not PROVE that there was a real difference. They DECLARED that the two terms were different. It was *argumentum ad baculum* appeal to the stick of their authority. I remind people that such arguments have declared fallacious, and that it is okay to ignore the "argument". (That doesn't mean that their proposition is right or wrong, just that they were lazy and took a stupid short cut.)

I have no objections to Alan blowing his nose or scratching his own arse and rendering havoc to his own cells, since they can be provably shown to be his own via their DNA. "I can do what I want with my own body" is axiomatic and is not being questioned here. PROVING its ONLY your own body you're mucking around with is a far different matter. Let us not resurrect the old chestnut that "The baby is part of the woman's body, and she can do what she wants with her own body, so abortion is not wrong." Please leave THAT old

nag where Biology shot and buried her. If you wish to debate the issue of "what if the mother cloned herself?", then you are free to do so, but how would any conclusions we reach debating THAT side issue apply in the (vast) majority of pregnancies where the mother did NOT clone herself?

I will leave it to others to decide if Alan's appeal to technology that **currently exists only in the future** as moral justification for behavior taking place in the here and now, is persuasive.

I suppress the temptation to make a snide comment about the cognitive facilities of pro-abortionists, and instead must marvel at the non-appearance of a pro-abortion derivative of the troll: Past experience on Usenet made me expect one to have popped up three days ago. This is a credit to the visitors to this site: We may disagree, and may try hard to push our viewpoints, but I, for one, feel that the discussion has been civil so far.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Sat, 06/28/2003 - 15:40 | [reply](#)

Calm down a bit, there

Well, Ptah, you did reference "...the implications of the subsequent fusion which not only DOES have a full compliment [*sic*] of provably human DNA, but starts dividing and growing as if there was no tomorrow" in your initial effort to counter the 'every sperm is scared' theory. I readily admit that this quote should not be interpreted as "a single cell is a person, simply because it has a full complement of DNA." I think that your capital-letter condemnation of Gil was a bit *uncivil*, though-- especially since I plucked that quote from your first post (unless you were the anonymous first poster). I waggle a reproving finger at you.

Fortunately, we all agree that gametes deserve no protection, and that children who have been born do. The pesky nine months in between, though, have been quite the bone of contention.

The original article actually was concerned with in vitro fertilization, and under what conditions the creation of fertilized eggs *not intended for gestation* is acceptable. Since Ptah believes that humanity begins at fertilization, it then follows that the creation of multiple zygotes from which to make a selection is wrong. Also, the extraction of embryonic stem cells from a zygote (which basically destroys it) is wrong.

I disagree. While there is some biologist bias at work in my case, I believe that (for example) an eight-cell embryo, which is no larger than the original egg and nominally undifferentiated, is not a person. Unfortunately for me, this view robs me of a convenient demarcation line for when humanity begins.

There is some confusion on the original subject of the seemingly absurd British view on embryo selection. The reasoning behind it was touched upon by Ptah, but I believe that I can clarify. The government policy does indeed ignore the health of Child 1 (who is

hardly a "hypochondriac")-- but by allowing embryo selection in the case of a heritable condition, the policy's intention is to *prevent* a "case where the parents could end up with two children with the disease" that the author feared.

I disagree with this policy, just as the author did. If it is moral to use embryo selection in order to ensure that Child 2 is disease-free, then it is at least as moral to use such selection to save the life of Child 1.

-Mitch

Rising Nucleotides

by **Mitch** on Mon, 06/30/2003 - 06:52 | [reply](#)

Hmm...

Mitch writes:

I think that your capital-letter condemnation of Gil was a bit uncivil, though-- especially since I plucked that quote from your first post (unless you were the anonymous first poster). I waggle a reproving finger at you.

You admit that it's quite a stretch from what I said to what Gil said I was saying. The question revolves around whether he made an honest mistake of interpretation of what I said, or tried to twist what I said into something else for the express purpose of creating a straw man upon which to argue *Reducto ad absurdum*. My conclusion, given the care I've tried to be clear, was that he was attempting the latter. My response was definitely not the customary way pro-lifers handle pro-abortion proponents like him, or Alan for that matter, and I thought a lot about the consequences before hitting the "post" button. Before you waggle your finger at me, however, ask yourself if you would have wagged it at a pro-abortionist smacking down, in the same way and manner, a pro-lifer who committed the same *faux pas*. Let me clue you in: pro-abortionists wouldn't have hesitated a microsecond if the victim was a pro-lifer, and would have used much more sarcastic terms to put them, and all other pro-lifers, into as unfavorable light as possible.

Somehow, I get the impression you would have smiled and given the pro-abortionist a pass.

Mitch also said (emphasis mine):

While there is some biologist bias at work in my case,

Thank you for stating your possible bias.

I believe that (for example) an eight-cell embryo, which is no larger than the original egg and nominally undifferentiated, is not a person. **Unfortunately for me, this view robs me of a convenient demarcation line for when humanity begins.**

That last sentence, which I bolded, precisely articulates my

concern: There **has** to be an undeniable, undisputable, unquestionable "demarcation line for when humanity begins." I will assume that your use of the word "convenient" means, "easy to identify".

Mitch continues:

I disagree with this policy, just as the author did. If it is moral to use embryo selection in order to ensure that Child 2 is disease-free, then it is at least as moral to use such selection to save the life of Child 1.

This is going to probably be misunderstood, but I'll try: I agree with Mitch that both statements are part of the same set of morals, and that it is contradictory to hold one to be valid and the other not valid. You accept one, you have to accept the other. My concern is that there are other moral statements that are "necessarily" part of the same set that, by the same reasoning, are decidedly unsavory. (such as "It is morally acceptable to exploit the body of one human being without permission to help another," and "The intentions held by one human being is sufficient justification to determine the destiny of another human being," among others.)

I put "necessarily" in quotes, since I am always willing and ready to re-evaluate my arguments and reasoning as to their moral kinship, and believe that "reasoning together", rather than "debating", is the preferable way of confirming or denying what I believe. Believe me, I've TRIED to do that, but it just seems to me that most pro-abortionists freak out when asked to evaluate arguments that entertain seriously, even if only for the sake of argument, the premise that their concept of personhood **doesn't scale**, or **shouldn't scale**.

To give credit where due, you, Mitch, are the most likely person I've encountered that's capable of doing that.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 13:25 | [reply](#)

ahhh crumbs...

By that last line, I'm mean that Mitch is capable of entertaining seriously, even if only for the sake of argument, the premise that their concept of personhood doesn't scale, or shouldn't scale, without "freaking out". That's supposed to be a compliment.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 13:28 | [reply](#)

Meta

Ptah,

I don't want to get involved in an elaborate meta-discussion about

who said/meant what, but in case you're interested, your conclusion:

The question revolves around whether he made an honest mistake of interpretation of what I said, or tried to twist what I said into something else for the express purpose of creating a straw man upon which to argue Reducto ad absurdum. My conclusion, given the care I've tried to be clear, was that he was attempting the latter.

was wrong.

Your "argument" was:

You scratch your arse.

NOW you scratch your boss's wife's arse.

Moral: the difference is only DNA.

By this I thought you were saying that these two actions, which yield radically different social repercussions, were different entirely because the skin cells under his fingernails would have different DNA after these actions. I was led to this conclusion, partly because you have asserted that the time of conception was a reasonable demarcation point largely because that's when the cells contain a full complement of DNA.

I changed the scenario, knowingly, to identical twins to show that it is NOT the DNA that makes the difference, but that in fact two people have completely separate identities independently of their DNA makeup. A small change to your scenario illustrates how wrong this approach of over-emphasizing the DNA is. I was not trying to imply that my scenario was yours. I was trying to imply that yours, as I understood it, proved nothing interesting, and that DNA does not constitute personhood, but, rather, minds do.

I also was not trying to characterize your position as saying that his boss's wife was under his fingernails, just that the DNA difference is somehow vital to this scenario rather than the identity of the scratchee. I was saying that the DNA and the identity of the scratchee are different things, and used the identical twins to show that.

If I have misunderstood your argument, perhaps you could state it more explicitly so that it would be clearer to me and, perhaps, others.

by [Gil](#) on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 17:40 | [reply](#)

The game is afoot!

I've been examined and analysed. Cool. :-)

In referring to the point at which humanity begins, I think that I meant 'convenient' in an intellectual sense. This is approximately the grayest gray area known to man, and here I am, only certain

that the transition to possessing individual rights occurs... somewhere... during gestation.

Moral issue #2: "The intentions held by one human being is sufficient justification to determine the destiny of another human being."

I'm interpreting the reference to destiny as referring to genetic makeup. This is certainly a moral issue. Anyone who agrees with the creation of 'spare' zygotes is likely to also accept screening of said zygotes for a Horrible Genetic Disease that the parents are known to carry. Intentional selection of a 'savior' child is the next moral step. Farther up the ladder, there are things like selecting for gender... and by that point, a decent portion of people will have strong reservations.

Moral issue #1: "It is morally acceptable to exploit the body of one human being without permission to help another."

This is, indeed, a bit... 'morally rude,' if you will. You cannot get the permission of a newborn baby, but neither can she deny it. This does not make a procedure automatically acceptable, of course. In the example in the original article, it seems that only a sample of cells from the cord was necessary, and I believe that would steer around this moral issue. If we had a theoretical situation where a tissue or organ had to be taken from the actual body of the infant, then a risk/benefit analysis would ensue. There could easily be situations where you could get most people to agree that the righteousness of the help trumped the moral concerns about permission to take a sample.

I don't think that I understand what you mean about the scaling of the concept of personhood. It takes an awful lot to make me freak out, though. And, for that matter, a shouting match serves no intellectual purpose. So, do write back.

Mitch

Rising Nucleotides

by **Mitch** on Wed, 07/02/2003 - 00:09 | [reply](#)

***Note to self...**

You're better as the straight man...* Given the nature and shortness of my post, I'll take responsibility for not being clear enough and causing confusion on Gil's part.

Gil first. Whether something is "interesting" or not is not only personal, but quite subjective: I don't think O.J. merely thought that the DNA evidence gathered at the crime scene pointing at him was merely "interesting". In fact, he had an incentive to make sure everyone agreed it "wasn't interesting". "Interesting" wasn't on his mind when he heard that.

You're probably thinking that I think that unique DNA defines personhood. Not my intent: Your Arse is yours, so you scratching it should have no consequences. Scratching an arse that's NOT yours

potentially DOES. The appeal to identical twins only means that there is one chance out of 6 billion plus that the identity test will fail. Not zero, but close enough to me. Heck, the DNA evidence against OJ was good to 1 out of a million: good enough to force the defense team to attack the chain of custody instead of the test itself.

Currently, this is not an issue: I would say that 100% of the people doing embryo research TODAY are not doing it on their identical twin's embryo. Neither are abortionists, nor their paying customers. Would you bet against a DNA match in those cases? I don't think so.

What happens when cloning becomes common? Good question, and I thank you for the initial question that helped me realize a few interesting episodes in Star Trek, Next Generation. There was one where a world full of clones took the cells of Riker and the substitute doctor (whose name I forget) to clone fresh bodies. Riker and the doctor went in and terminated their own clones. The leader called them murderers, but I wondered why they didn't think themselves so. It just became clear: There'd be all kinds of abuses of clones based on the "It's my DNA, so I should decide what to do with cells from my own body" argument. (Doesn't hold water for pregnant women, but does for clones) Slaves? Sources for body parts? Certainly there'd be laws governing the creation of clones and their disposition, since one can picture abuses of human beings that, by your definition, would be people. However, there should be no doubt that people who make clones of OTHER people to exploit for their own purposes would be guilty: Not the same DNA. Not THEIR DNA. (This is hypothetical, discussing laws of a fictional government governing a technology we don't have yet. Need to think about it, though.)

BTW, Here's a link to a reference on **birth rate of identical twins**, which puts the twinning rate at 4 per 1000. Thus, it works out that slightly more than 99.2% of the people DON'T suffer from this problem.

Now Mitch: "The game is afoot!"??? *looks around* what ARE we hunting for? If it's for the truth (or at least enough solid ground to base a realistic morality upon), then I'm game. No bag limit, I hope!

Firstly, on the question of "destiny". I used the term to refer to determining the future of the unborn human being in question. Will they live or die? What will they be used for? After they have served their purpose, what will they be their fate?

Let's think about this: the parents are NOT screening AGAINST the disease in question, but deliberately FOR the disease. One of the (I admit very strong) arguments FOR abortion is to PREVENT the birth of such children and their subsequent misery. If to save child A from X, they want to conceive child B WITH the Disease, then who's to save Child B? Another child C, also with X? A vicious cycle that can only be prevented by ABORTING child B before birth, but AFTER taking what they need to save Child A (Moral #1). If this was their

intention from the beginning, then they're deciding the destiny of B (Moral #2). I heard of one woman who sex selected and gave birth to a second child, for the express purpose of providing a compatible kidney for his brother.

It's very late, and I desperately need to get to bed since (speaking of arses),

I'm up to mine in alligators at work. What I mean by "scaling of personhood" is the notion that someone starts off with 0% personhood, and as it grows, gets more personhood, with it reaching 100% shortly before birth. *shakes head* What CAN you do with a 30% person that you can't do with an 80% person? Moral quagmire IMHO, since the vast majority of our experience has been with 100% persons, and the experience of treating negros as 2/3rds of a person wasn't what we would NOW call a raging success. "Human being" is more precise and scientific. Should we use HB instead because we want to save keystrokes?

G'night all. *gets bad feeling he left something out, though*

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Thu, 07/03/2003 - 03:32 | [reply](#)

It was very sticky, and I couldn't move

I recall that episode of Star Trek: TNG, and my interpretation was that since the crewpeople hadn't given permission to be cloned, and duplicating a person without permission being a very bad thing, the only way to rectify the situation was to terminate the clone before he or she emerged from the tube. A standard 'lesser of two evils' sort of choice.

Later, on Deep Space Nine, Odo tells us that killing your own clone is still murder. In that case, the clone was already a walking, talking person, so we would all likely agree that person had rights as an individual. I do not feel that this is inconsistent with the earlier Star Trek example, and not just because I support abortion. The actions of Riker and co. were somewhat justified because the clones were wrongfully created in the first place. Quite the mess, really.

Back in the real world, I'm coming to the conclusion that anything which involves an unborn baby is, indeed, a moral quagmire. (Ah! I used the Q word) You bring up an interesting example on the subject of scalable personhood. The infamous "three-fifths compromise" in the US Constitution is, in fact, the only example I can think of where people are counted as a specific fraction of a whole person. Those were definitely unfortunate times in human history, but being 60% of a person in the eyes of Congress wasn't the crux of the matter. The central issue is that slaves were property, and therefore had no rights recognized by the government, so you could do whatever you wanted to them, and there was no legal recourse. Embryos and fetuses are in a similar situation today, since they lack legal personhood-- though there are laws on these matters. What I cannot tell you at this time, unfortunately, is how things **should** be.

I support the vague (and therefore vulnerable to attack) position on

abortion that after the fifth month or so, it shouldn't be done. "You didn't take responsibility, and get it over with when you should have." Pro-choice people generally disapprove of positions or laws like that, because it gives the pro-lifers an inch, when (by definition) they want the whole mile.

It would be easier to just pick up an "Abortion is always acceptable" placard, but I just don't believe that. At, say, eight months, I can't see a sufficient difference as compared to infanticide.

"sigh" I obviously need to think about this futher. I think I'll do a piece on some aspect of the matter over at [Nucleotides](#), especially since I haven't done anything on a biological subject yet.

by [Mitch](#) on Sat, 07/05/2003 - 22:19 | [reply](#)

nods

Sorry for the long delay: Still up to my hips in alligators at work.

Given the litigious nature of our society, I wouldn't be surprised if we eventually get some kind of legislation on cloning and the rights of the original owners of the cells from which the clones originate.

Personally, to me the problem is not as much that the situation is a quagmire (it certainly is), but that many don't seem to want to agree on what a signpost in the quagmire would look like. I'm not talking about disputing about particular signposts, but more like not wanting to adhere to any principles that would allow us to recognize a signpost if we happened to run into one.

For me, a helpful method has been to seek to avoid prejudice and hypocrisy. It means asking "do I want to discriminate against someone because of their age? Because of their physical appearance? Because of any temporary physical disability?" I couple these considerations with a healthy appreciation of the (historically proven) ability of human oppressors to rationalize and justify their behavior. In some correspondence with Leo (who commented earlier), he mentioned that, in the presence of doubt, one should err on the side of caution and prudence.

One of these days, I shall definitely have to pop by Nucleotides and see what you have, mitch.

Ptah

by [ptah](#) on Thu, 07/10/2003 - 18:53 | [reply](#)

Summary, Questions, and Meta

I'm trying to frame the arguments in a more concise way so I can understand them. Questions from me start with a B:

This might be wrong, missing some arguments, and some of this is

inferred, so feel free to correct:

Shared assumptions:

A human starts after a human sperm and human egg join to form an embryo. As soon as they're together, they're an embryo and they're human.

B: Side question from me, at what point of their joining is it a human?

Innocent persons should not be killed.

(Possibly also "Innocent intelligent beings should not be killed.")

Pro-embryo life:

A human is the same as a person.

An embryo if not interfered with will develop into a full-grown human and therefore should be considered human.

Pro-abortion/Pro-choice:

A human isn't the same thing as a person.

To be a person, a creature requires both human DNA and a mind.

An embryo doesn't have a mind and is therefore not a person.

An embryo requires sustenance and can't develop independently without it, so the idea that it will develop into a human without interference is questionable.

B: It seems that from the court case, that British law implies that an embryo + the agreement from a willing donor to provide sustenance (not to abort) is a person?

B: What exactly is a mind? How does one know whether another creature has a mind? A certain mass of brain cells? A certain demonstration of intelligence?

I'm putting the meta at the end so people can skip it if desired:

So far the argument has been very slow to come to actual explanations for believing one side or the other. I'm finding this a bit frustrating as I seem to have a very short attention span. It's not a mental illness so much as a not being eager to read lots of junk in order to get the point. I prefer more conciseness in arguments and for other stuff to be obviously separated so I can skip them if I want. Maybe follow this format and put meta at the end?

It doesn't seem right to ridicule those who disagree with one - to assume that one's evidence and arguments are so obviously clear that only an idiot would believe something else (I don't think even an idiot deserves ridicule. Pity maybe.) This seems counter-productive and just not very nice.

I think this could even apply to making fun of ideas. People get their self-image mixed up with their ideas pretty frequently, I think. Making fun of their ideas could make it more difficult for them to accept the potentially better idea. Accepting the better idea becomes linked with accepting that they are stupid idiots who deserve ridicule.

Of course, everyone is free to do what they want. I appreciate the

authors who have kindly provided this forum even if I don't always like the jokes.

Cheers,
Becky Moon

by [beckyam](#) on Sun, 07/17/2005 - 14:51 | [reply](#)

Define "viable"

A fertilized egg removed for the womb could not survive. At conception you have 1 1/2 cells. No organs, no brain, nothing distinguishable. 1 cell. Consider the second before conception - sperm a millimeter away from egg. Human? Consider a moment later - sperm touching egg. Human? Consider a moment later - sperm partially inside egg, but genetic material still separate. Human? How about when DNA has entered the egg, but not yet the nucleus? Or when it has entered the nucleus but not yet integrated with the egg DNA. Which of these events defines conception?

Just as there is no concrete point at which you can call an embryo a human, also conception itself is an arbitrary point in time. It seems to me that it makes more sense to define the development of a brain and the capacity to feel pain as defining human - even though that does not happen at any exact time.

Your concessions for incest and rape are proof that you recognize a fundamental difference between babies and embryos.

No one who supports exceptions to anti-abortion laws would ever suggest that it would be OK to kill an already born baby because of rape, incest, or health problems.

Just so you know, I used to be "pro-life" myself, and I held the same arguments you do. I do not, therefor, look down on your opinion as stupid. I respect atheist pro-lifers far more than religious people (who only know what's moral if a book tells them), especially when they are anti-war and anti-death penalty. It is at least consistent.

I believe, however, that it is misguided.

The basic principal for action should always be whether or not a particular action hurts an individual. An "individual-to-be" is no more capable of being hurt than an "individual-who-could-be" and therefor it is a reasonable comparison to say that abortion is no more or less moral than allowing a woman's period to pass without fertilizing her - as that is an egg which could develop into a human, if...

by [Jay Aziza](#) on Wed, 12/20/2006 - 19:54 | [reply](#)