

Embryo Abuse

When Does Life Begin?

Medical textbooks recognise fertilisation, when a sperm fuses with an ovum, as the start of a new life. This single cell is a whole human being, not a part of the father or mother, whether it is created in a woman's body or on a laboratory slide.

Reasons Given for Research and Rebuttals

Some argue that research on human embryos is harmless because the embryo cannot feel pain at this stage. There is no question of feeling pain so early (though many later abortions are carried out without anaesthetic on babies who can certainly feel pain). But surely it would not be ethical to end the life of a born human being who has been sedated. So the issue is not whether the human embryo can feel pain, but, rather, whether the embryo is a human being – that is, a human organism. Since this is scientifically undisputed, we find the “no pain” argument to be fallacious.

Others contend that embryo research is acceptable because it is “in a good cause”. But could we experiment on a born human being at the expense of his/her life if it were for a good cause? The issue is not whether the cause is good, but whether it justifies the means. Experimenters may have good motives, and life-affirming scientific progress is certainly good, but we are not willing to sacrifice the lives of human beings for scientific purposes.

Even with the best intentions, and even painlessly, it can never be right to deliberately end an innocent human life, or to use one human being as a guinea pig for the benefit of another.

The Law on Embryo Research

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 states that it is legal in the U.K. to undertake experiments on human embryos up to 14 days from fertilisation at which time they must be destroyed. Researchers are allowed to use embryos left over from IVF treatment programmes to obtain embryonic stem cells.

The IVF clinic freezes surplus embryos created during IVF treatment for future use by the infertile woman. If unused, these embryos are compulsorily destroyed after five years. IVF embryos may also be tested for genetic defects or late-onset conditions, such as bowel cancer and those diagnosed with a defect are destroyed.