

Human Rights for All

In recent days there has been a concerted effort to delegitimize any objections to embryo-killing. Some have gone so far as to say that society has a moral obligation to pursue lines of research involving embryo-killing at taxpayers' expense. Advocates of this killing have tried to malign those with objections by claiming that they are imposing their “**personal, private, and religious**” views upon everyone else and are preventing the development of needed cures.

We disagree.

All human beings are equal.

Basic justice requires that we not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, or ethnicity. Likewise, justice requires that we not discriminate on the basis of age, size, stage of development, or condition of dependency. We see this doctrine of equality clearly embedded in our Nation's principles as stated in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, 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.” Likewise, the 14th Amendment states: “No state shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

Human beings are intrinsically valuable and have rights because of what they are.

Our Founding Fathers knew that human rights are not bestowed by the government or by a majority. Human beings have rights by virtue of their humanity. Our rights do not derive from our strength or beauty, from our intelligence or talents, or from our usefulness to others or to society as a whole. This explains why we defend the life of a mentally handicapped child just as much as the life of a Nobel Prize winning scientist. It would be manifestly evil to kill a mentally handicapped child to harvest his organs for transplant, just as it was wrong to enslave black human beings for labor, or to exterminate Jews to create an “ideal” race.

Our nation's laws must extend the same basic rights and protections to all human beings.

If attacks were made on the mentally handicapped, African-Americans, or Jews, we would expect our government to pass laws protecting them. We would not expect our political leaders to say that they were personally opposed to killing the mentally ill, but thought others – for the good of science – should have a choice to do so. We would not expect our leaders to say that they were personally opposed to slavery, but thought others should have the choice to own a slave. We would not expect our leaders to say they were personally opposed to the Holocaust, but thought others had a right to choose to exterminate a class of people. Our opposition to killing innocent human beings is not merely “personal” or “private.” It is a principled judgment based upon the demands of justice. We have a duty to protect the members of our society under attack by passing legislation prohibiting their abuse, and prosecuting violators. We certainly wouldn't argue for federal funding to subsidize the killing of the mentally handicapped, African-Americans or Jews.

Why should it be any different with human beings in the embryonic stage?

Our opponents insist that embryos are not human beings, or if they are human beings, they are not yet “persons.” But it defies scientific fact to say that human embryos are anything other than human beings at a certain, very early, stage of development. And it is outrageous to relegate some human beings to the status of “human non-persons.”

A human embryo is a complete human being at the beginning of development.

Some people say that we don't know—even can't know—when the life of a new human being begins. They depict it as a mystery—a “metaphysical” or even “theological” question. But this is nonsense. Human embryogenesis and intrauterine development are, in their essentials, well understood. As to “when life begins,” every textbook of embryology and developmental biology currently in use in American medical schools gives the same testimony. The most prominent of these texts, *The Developing Human* (7th ed, 2003), by Keith Moore and T.V.N. Persaud, accurately defines the human embryo as “the developing human during its early stages of development.” It notes that “human development begins at fertilization when a male gamete or sperm (spermatozoon) unites with a female gamete or oocyte (ovum) to form a single cell — a zygote. This highly specialized, totipotent cell marked the *beginning of each of us as a unique individual.*” This is not metaphysics or theology: it is elementary human biology.

Each of us began life as an embryo.

Prior to fertilization there are only gametes — sperm and ova — which are both genetically and functionally parts of larger entities, the father and the mother. But when a sperm and ovum fuse, the life of a new, unique, genetically complete and distinct human being begins. While none of us was ever a sperm or an egg, *each of us was once an embryo* — or more properly, an embryonic human being — just as each of us was once an adolescent, child, infant, and fetus. These terms refer not to different kinds of beings, but to stages in the natural development of a human being. Embryos, fetuses, infants, adolescents, and adults differ not *in kind* (or substance), *but in maturity or stage of development.* Regardless of how many people claim that an embryo is merely a “clump of cells,” the facts of science prove that it is a human being. To have destroyed the entities that we were in the embryonic stage would have been to have destroyed us; it would not have been merely to prevent possible human beings from coming into existence.



We are **100% in support** of the advancement of science and medicine, and we are **100% in support** of the development of stem cell therapy; **but we insist that all scientific and medicinal research proceed while abiding to the objective demands of justice.** Adult, umbilical cord, and placenta stem cell therapies do just this – without harming human beings – and they have cured thousands of people suffering from over 56 different maladies. Embryonic stem cell therapy, however – which has yet to be used in a single treatment – requires the destruction of human beings.

Before forming your own opinion, please consider these reflections.

A human embryo is not a potential human being. Rather, it is a human being with potential.

In the embryonic stage of our lives, each of us possessed the genetic constitution and epigenetic primordia to develop by a process of internal self-direction and self-integration from the embryonic into and through the fetal, infant, child, and adolescent stages of development, and into adulthood with our unity, determinateness, and identity intact. In other words, each of us came into being as a human being; none of us became a human being only at some point after coming into being. In the embryonic stage of our lives, we were not “potential human beings,” for we were human beings already. We were potential adults. Our potential was, like the potential of a fetus or a newborn infant, to mature into adulthood.

It is wrong to intentionally kill human beings at any stage of development.

If it is a well established fact that human embryos are human beings, why are we entertaining discussions about federally funded embryo-destructive research? Just as it would be evil to kill a mentally handicapped child to harvest his organs for transplant, so too would it be evil to kill the embryonic human being to harvest his stem cells for scientific research. Just as it was wrong to exterminate Jews, so too is it wrong to execute embryos, even for the laudable goal of fighting disease.

The direct and intentional killing of innocent human life is the most important political consideration.

We realize that many candidates who support embryo protection fail on other issues. We yearn for the day when all candidates will be pro-embryo-protection, so that we may choose our representatives on the criteria of other issues. While some of us may prefer the economic, educational, health and foreign policies of certain pro-embryo-destruction candidates, we recognize that the issues surrounding embryo-destructive research are of paramount importance, and we are forced to distinguish between socially desirable policies and the perpetuation of intrinsically evil acts. Imagine someone claiming, “I'm not a fan of Jefferson Davis's support of slavery, but his economic policies are more important.”

More than 1.3 million human lives are extinguished every year in abortions, and even more will die if unbridled embryo-destructive research is permitted. No candidate's tax, educational, or foreign policy can be so good — and certain of its promises — that it justifies tolerating so grave an injustice on so massive a scale. Pro-life citizens are not of one mind on the war in Iraq. But we see that no candidate is running on a platform of targeting innocent civilians or even accepting “collateral damage” at the rate of 1.3 million deaths per year. Even opponents of the war should see that the massacre against the unborn is the graver evil.

Contrary to the claims of our opponents, none of our appeals have been personal, private, or religious. Our simple demand is for the equal protection of all human beings.

This November, we ask that you do not support politicians who deny basic human rights to an entire class of human beings. A vote for a pro-embryo-destruction candidate is a vote for the direct and intentional killing of innocent human beings.

Written and signed, October 19th, by the student-members of:

Princeton University Pro-Life; Choose Life at Yale: an Undergraduate Organization; Harvard Right to Life; Cornell Coalition for Life; University of Pennsylvania for Life; Dartmouth Coalition for Life; Stanford Students for Life; First Right at UVA; Students for Life at NYU; Georgetown University Right to Life; MIT Pro-Life; Notre Dame Right to Life; Johns Hopkins University Voice for Life; University of California Berkeley Students for Life;