

Human Rights for All

32 years ago, the Supreme Court of the United States denied the most basic of human rights - life - to the most vulnerable of people - unborn children. As we approach this anniversary, we pause to consider its ramifications – over 44 million dead children.

The authors of the Court’s *Roe v. Wade* decision found a constitutional right to privacy that guaranteed the right to an abortion. But in doing so, they failed to consider what – or who – it was that was being aborted. They went so far as to write: “*We need not resolve the*

difficult question of when life begins. ... There has always been strong support for the view that life does not begin until live birth.”

All citizens, including the Supreme Court Justices, need to consider the question of when a human’s life begins. It is now abundantly clear that a new, unique, and infinitely valuable human being begins life at conception. While some will try to malign this view by calling it “personal, private, and religious”, in actuality it simply rests on the facts of science and the demands of justice.

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.”

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. These 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 and fetal stages?

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 (and philosophically untenable) 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.

A human embryo (and fetus) 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 and fetuses are human beings, why do we provide them with no legal protection? Why are we entertaining discussions about federally funded embryo-destructive research? Just as it would be gravely 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, or to “abort” a fetus for maternal “choice”.

The direct and intentional killing of innocent human beings can never be tolerated in a free society.

More than 1.3 million human lives are extinguished every year in abortions, and even more lives will be lost if unbridled embryo-destructive research is permitted. No society can be truly free when its most vulnerable members are afforded no protection under the law. It is a duty of all people of good will to put public pressure on their political representatives to hold them accountable for the protection of all human beings. Knowing that no political movement ever achieves its goals without first a change in heart within the members of society, we yearn for the day when all children will be welcomed at birth and cherished in life.

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.