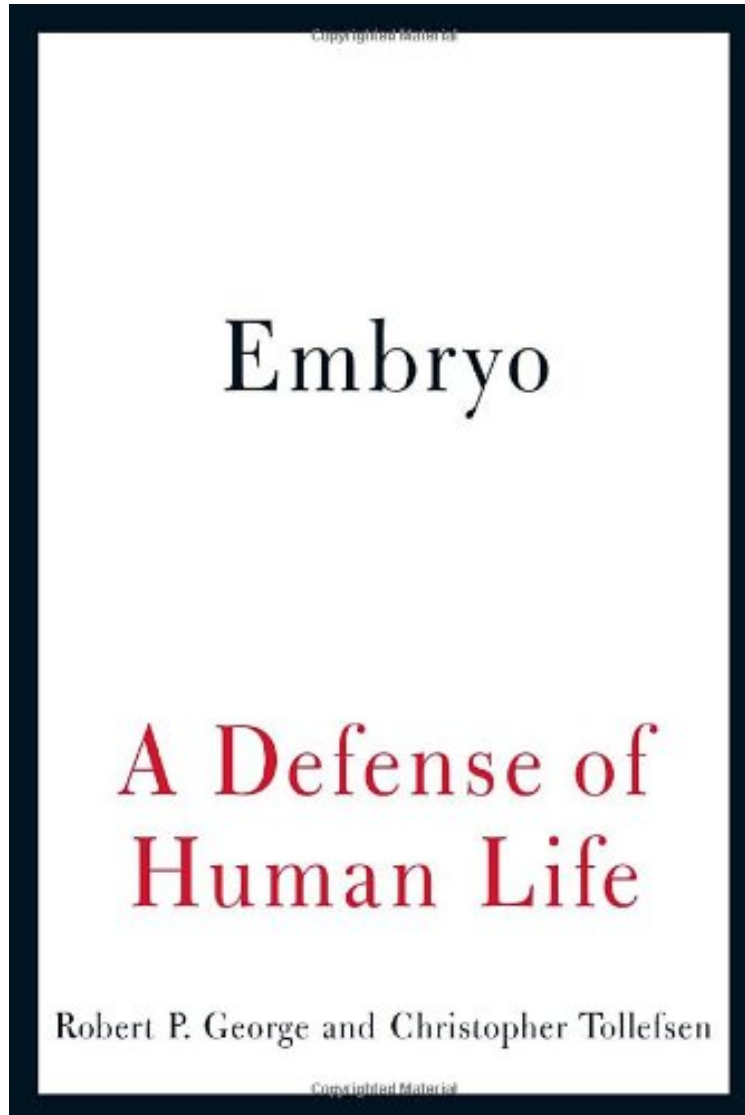


Embryo: A Defense of Human Life

Robert P. George, Christopher Tollefsen
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Robert P. George, Christopher Tollefsen : Embryo: A Defense of Human Life before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Embryo: A Defense of Human Life:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. THE defense of the embryo as a human personBy Bobby BambinoThe first chapter is very good, as it clearly lays out the framework for the questions that will be addressed throughout the rest of the book. Important distinctions are made, and the analogy of "killing retarded people for their organs" clearly illustrates why most pro-hESCR replies to our arguments do not even address the issue, let alone rebut the objection. This, of course, is the same problem with a good 90% (my estimate) of pro-choice arguments, as

Beckwith points out in *Defending Life*. The authors then go on to argue their substance view of the human person. This is contrasted with dualistic theories like those of Descartes and others. This is important because if we don't know what it is that makes us valuable and worthy of life, then we are on totally different pages when arguing the question with those in favor of h-ESCR. Not only do the authors contrast their views with "old" philosophers like Descartes, but they interact with current bioethicists like Ron Green and Lee Silver, two leading proponents of h-ESCR, as well as many others. Many good things have been said about this book already, so I will simply add that this book gives the best defense to the "burning fertility clinic scenario" I have ever read. This argument can sometimes catch pro-lifers off guard (as it did once to me and I didn't have a convincing answer to it) but the authors show how terribly flimsy and weak it really is. It is good to have a response to this argument because it has found its way into the "popular" arena where the average man on the street can give this argument and seem like he has a strong case against valuing embryos. However, the argument patently fails as the authors very well demonstrate. This is one of the main issues of our times, and people need to be well read in clear, rational thinking about these issues which forgo all religious and emotive arguments. This book does precisely that.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Valuable Contribution to this Vital Public Topic

By rodboomboom

When does the human being, person, individual begin? This question is vexing our society. Here George and Tollefsen present a coherent answer to this not from religion or theology, but from science, morality and public policy. There are different loci to this issue, the moral, the scientific, the political, which they categorize as: embryo science, embryo technology and embryo ethics. Science and technology do not answer the vital question which is the major thrust of this effort: "guidance in making moral decisions about the treatment of those embryos or of human beings at any developmental stage." They persistently rely upon their conclusion from embryo science that: from "embryologists and developmental biologists, who are collectively responsible for the standard textbooks in their fields, agree in making fertilization, not gastrulation, as the beginning of the human individual." This they summarize in this well put phrase: "the early human embryo is not "a potential human" but a "human with potential". They then proceed to take on all challengers who would deny this human being the right to all the moral rights and protections that we all have from solely from being what we are, a human being. These include such as dualism, utilitarianism, consequentialism, those that would deny that the early human embryo is not a whole individual, etc. They also contend with those who put forward that embryonic stem cells are equivalent to embryos and make the important point that the early human embryo has everything it needs inside itself to come to development as a human being if protected and allowed to develop. Their arguments seem well conceived and the reputations they offer to their challengers strikes this reviewer initially as significant. I wait however to review the continuing debate between the sides. This civility in reaching public policy the authors correctly state is the overarching impetus for this book's being published. I appreciate they do not enter into any theological argumentation, although this certainly is near and dear to many of us. That they can provide this coherent and captivating argument above all others must be dealt with by the opposition in public forum avenues. Anyone interested at all in this controversial area with any amount of open mindedness will want to read this finely crafted effort. They conclude by placing forward three major proposals for each of three areas, i.e. Technological, Cultural and Political.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Well written

By Almage

"Embryo" is a great book for the educated layman on the topic of personhood and beginnings of human life. The authors, George and Tollefsen, explain their thesis in down to earth terms, and without relying on religious arguments. Their position is that the person begins at conception and that the modern biologic sciences affirms this position. They succeed in developing their thesis and in defending it against a number of opposing arguments. The best book I have read on the embryonic personhood issue.

The bitter national debates over abortion, euthanasia, and stem cell research have created an unbridgeable gap between religious groups and those who insist that faith-based views have no place in public policy. Religious conservatives are so adamantly opposed to stem cell research in particular that President Bush issued the first veto of his presidency over a bill that would have provided federal funding for such research. Now, in this timely consideration of the nature and rights of human embryos, Robert P. George and Christopher Tollefsen make a persuasive case that we as a society should neither condone nor publicly fund embryonic stem cell research of any kind. Typically, right-to-life arguments have been based explicitly on moral and religious grounds. In *Embryo*, the authors eschew religious arguments and make a purely scientific and philosophical case that the fetus, from the instant of conception, is a human being, with all the moral and political rights inherent in that status. As such, stem cell research that destroys a viable embryo represents the unacceptable taking of a human life. There is also no room in their view for a moral dualism that regards being a person as merely a stage in a human life span. An embryo does not exist in a prepersonal stage that does not merit the inviolable rights otherwise ascribed to persons. Instead, the authors argue, the right not to be intentionally killed is inherent in the fact of being a human being, and that status begins at the moment of conception. Moreover, just as none should be excluded from moral and legal protections based on race, sex, religion, or ethnicity, none should be excluded on the basis of age, size, or stage of biological development. George and Tollefsen fearlessly grapple with the political, scientific, and cultural consequences arising from their position and offer a summary of scientific alternatives to embryonic stem cell research. They conclude that the state has an ethical and moral obligation to protect embryonic

human beings in just the same manner that it protects every other human being, and they advocate for embryo adoption as the only ethical solution to the problem of spare embryos resulting from in-vitro fertilization.

From Publishers Weekly In this unconvincing book, George (Making Men Moral), a member of the President's Council on Bioethics, and Tollefsen, a philosophy professor at the University of South Carolina, envision the mass production and exploitation of embryos by scientists for research. In response, they affirm emphatically that an embryo deserves the same moral respect as a human argument well-known from religious sources but to which the authors attempt to give a scientific basis. George and Tollefsen offer a detailed scientific analysis of the making of the embryo to conclude that even a single-cell zygote has all the genetic characteristics of a human being. Thus, the embryo is a complete or whole organism, though immature. Against those who argue that the embryo lacks consciousness and thus is not fully human, the authors reject mind-body dualism and argue that the embryo has the capacity to develop into a rational being. Yet while these questions continue to provoke controversy in relation to abortion as well as embryo research, this book provides no compelling new evidence about the moral status of the embryo to persuade readers who do not already agree with them. (Jan. 15) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

About the Author ROBERT P. GEORGE, a member of the President's Council on Bioethics, is a professor of jurisprudence and director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University. He is the author of Making Men Moral, In Defense of Natural Law, and The Clash of Orthodoxies. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey. CHRISTOPHER TOLLEFSEN is an associate professor in the department of philosophy at the University of South Carolina, the director of the graduate program in philosophy, and author of the forthcoming Biomedical Research and Beyond. He lives in Columbia, South Carolina. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER 1 What Is at Stake in the Embryo Experimentation Debate

NOAH AND THE FLOOD On January 16, 2007, a remarkable journey came to an end in Covington, Louisiana. Sixteen months earlier, Noah Benton Markhams life had been jeopardized by the winds and rain of Hurricane Katrina. Trapped in a flooded hospital in New Orleans, Noah depended upon the timely work of seven Illinois Conservation Police officers, and three Louisiana State officers who used flatbottomed boats to rescue Noah and take him to safety. Although many New Orleans residents tragically lost their lives in Katrina and its aftermath, Noahs story of rescue is, nevertheless, one of many inspirational tales of heroism from that national disaster. What, then, makes it unique? And why did the story of his rescue end sixteen months after the events of September 2006? The answer is that Noah has the distinction of being one of the youngest residents of New Orleans to be saved from Katrina: when the Illinois and Louisiana police officers entered the hospital where Noah was trapped, he was an embryo, a human being in the very earliest stages of development, frozen with fourteen hundred embryos in canisters of liquid nitrogen. Noahs story had a happy ending: Noahs parents were overjoyed those sixteen months later when Noah emerged, via cesarean section, into the light of the wide world. His parents named him in acknowledgment of a resourceful survivor of an earlier flood. His grandmother immediately started phoning relatives with the news: Its a boy! But if those officers had never made it to Noahs hospital, or if they had abandoned those canisters of liquid nitrogen, there can be little doubt that the toll of Katrina would have been fourteen hundred human beings higher than it already was, and Noah, sadly, would have perished before having the opportunity to meet his loving family. Let us repeat it: Noah would have perished. For it was Noah who was frozen in one of those canisters; Noah who was brought from New Orleans by boat; Noah who was subsequently implanted into his mothers womb; and Noah who was born on January 16, 2007. Noah started this remarkable journey as an embryo, or blastocyst, a name for a very early stage of development in a human beings life. Noah continued that journey after implantation into his mothers womb, growing into a fetus and finally an infant. And he will continue, we are confident, to grow into an adolescent and a teenager as he continues along the path to adulthood. Noahs progress in these respects is little different from that of any other member of the human race, save for the exertions necessary to save him at the very earliest stage of his life. But in later years, if Noah were to look back to that troubled time in New Orleans and ask himself whether he was rescued that day, whether it was his life that was saved, we believe that there is only one answer he could reasonably give himself: Of course!

THE MORAL This answer to Noah's question is a mere two words long, yet it contains the key to one of the most morally and politically troubled issues of our day. Is it morally permissible to produce and experiment upon human embryos? Is it morally permissible to destroy human embryos to obtain stem cells for therapeutic purposes? Is it morally permissible to treat human embryos as disposable research material that may be used and destroyed to benefit others? All such questions have the seeds of their answer in these two words. For what Noah would be saying in these two words and his answer is confirmed by all the best science is that human embryos are, from the very beginning, human beings, sharing an identity with, though younger than, the older human beings they will grow up to become. Human embryos are not, that is to say, some other type of animal organism, like a dog or cat. Neither are they a part of an organism, like a heart, a kidney, or a skin cell. Nor again are they a disorganized aggregate, a mere clump of cells awaiting some magical transformation. Rather, a human embryo is a whole living member of the species Homo sapiens in the earliest stage of his or her natural development. Unless severely damaged, or denied or deprived of a suitable environment, a human being in the embryonic stage will, by directing its own integral organic functioning, develop himself or herself to the

next more mature developmental stage, i.e., the fetal stage. The embryonic, fetal, child, and adolescent stages are stages in the development of a determinate and enduring entity—a human being—who comes into existence as a single-celled organism (the zygote) and develops, if all goes well, into adulthood many years later. But does this mean that the human embryo is a human person worthy of full moral respect? Must the early embryo never be used as a mere means for the benefit of others simply because it is a human being? The answer that this book proposes and defends with philosophical arguments through the course of the next several chapters is Yes. This yes has many implications, for human life in its earliest stages and most dependent conditions is under threat today as in no other era. The United States, as well as many of the countries of Europe and the developed countries of Asia, are about to move beyond the past thirty years' experience of largely unrestricted abortion to a whole new regime of human embryo mass production and experimentation. This new regime requires new rationalizations. Whereas, in the past, the humanity of the fetus, or its moral worth, were ignored or denied in favor of an alleged right to privacy, or considerations of the personal tragedies of women experiencing unwanted pregnancies, what is now proposed is something quite different. The production of human embryos, and their destruction in biomedical research, will take place in public labs by teams of scientists. If those scientists and their many supporters have their way, their work will be funded, as it is or soon will be in California, New Jersey, and elsewhere, by the state or by the nation, and in either case by taxpayers' money. And if that work bears fruit, then the consequences of this research will be felt throughout the world of medicine and the pharmaceutical industry. (1) It will be virtually impossible for those with grave moral objections to such experimentation to remain free from entanglement in it: their money will pay for labs in their universities, and their doctors will routinely use the results of embryodestructive research. For example, in 2004, a ballot initiative known as Proposition 71 was passed in California. This referendum was supported by Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Republican governor of the state. Its backers contributed a tremendous amount of money, and much propaganda, to ensure its passage. The measure promises that up to \$3.1 billion will be spent on embryodestructive research over the next ten years. Even supporters of the research have pointed out that Proposition 71 threatens to bring about a largely unregulated industry that will inevitably line the pockets of a relative few. (2) But such objections, important as they are, ignore what this industry is centrally about: the production and destruction of human beings in the earliest stage of development. This basic truth is lost amidst discussion of therapeutic cloning or Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer (SCNT), euphemisms and technicalities designed to obscure rather than clarify. And amidst the promises of boundless health benefits from this research, it can become tempting to lose sight of all that is really at stake. But consider the following analogy. Suppose that a movement arose to obtain transplantable organs by killing mentally retarded infants. Would the controversy that would inevitably erupt over this be best characterized as a debate about organ transplantation? Would anyone accept as a legitimate description the phrase therapeutic organ harvesting? Surely not: the dispute would best be characterized—and in any decent society it would be characterized—as a debate about the ethics of killing retarded children in order to obtain their organs. (Indeed, in a truly decent society, the question would not arise at all!) Nor would the public, we submit, accept arguments for the practice that turned on considerations about how many gravely ill nonretarded people could be saved by extracting a heart, two kidneys, a liver, etc., from each retarded child. For the threshold question would be whether it is unjust to relegate a certain class of human beings—the retarded—to the status of objects that can be killed and dissected to benefit others. Similarly, there would be something almost obscene in worrying about underregulation of these procedures. By the same token, we should not be speaking, as in California, in terms of a debate about embryonic stem cell research; nor is the main moral issue that of adequate governmental oversight. No one would object to the use of embryonic stem cells in biomedical research or therapy if they could be derived without killing or in any way wronging the embryos. Nor would anyone object to using such cells if they could be obtained using embryos lost in spontaneous abortions. The point of the controversy is the ethics of deliberately destroying human embryos for the purpose of producing stem cells. The threshold question is whether it is unjust to kill members of a certain class of human beings—those in the embryonic stage of development—to benefit others. Thus we return to the significance of the story of Noah and the flood.

THE EMBRYO TECHNOLOGIES OF TODAY AND TOMORROW What is it, though, that is currently being done with embryos, or that can currently be done with embryos, or that might one day be done with ...