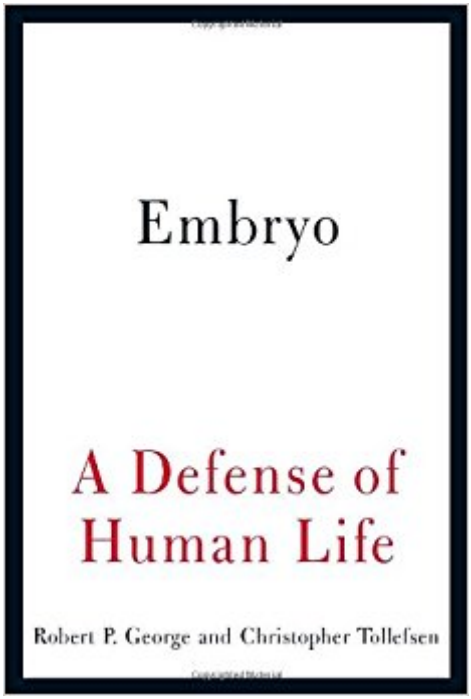
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Embryo: A Defense Of Human Life



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Synopsis

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 Ã¢â ¬Å“moral dualismÃ¢â ¬Â• that regards being a Ã¢â ¬Å“personÃ¢â ¬Â• as merely a stage in a human life span. An embryo does not exist in a Ã¢â ¬Å“prepersonalÃ¢â ¬Â• 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 adoptionÃ¢â ¬â •the only ethical solution to the problem of spare embryos resulting from in-vitro fertilization.

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Customer Reviews

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 humanÃ¢â ¬â •an 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 Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

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.

The 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 bioethecists 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 teh "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 issue which forgo all religious and emotive arguments. This book does precisely that.

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 is 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, consequentalism, 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 repute 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.

"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.

Good book, but I wish had mentioned that a newer edition is out. Now I will have to buy the book a second time to get the updated material.

Great service and book.

Law school

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