

And Nobody Opposes Fertility Clinics. Right?

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Writing in the Washington Post, Michael Kinsley thinks he has cornered opponents of embryo-destructive research into contradicting themselves. In fact all he does is reveal his ignorance of the pro-life movement.

Michael Kinsley attempts to skewer opponents of embryonic stem cell research on the sharp point of hypocrisy. Honing the point on the stone of the Holocaust Kinsley [writes](#), "if embryos are human beings with full human rights, fertility clinics are death camps — with a side order of cold-blooded eugenics. No one who truly believes in the humanity of embryos could possibly think otherwise." In other words, if you oppose embryonic stem cell research because it destroys human beings, then you must oppose fertility clinics as well. Fertility clinics, see, produce more embryos than required by fertility therapies and then destroy the remainder. So, if you oppose the destruction of embryos for stem cell research, logic compels you to oppose fertility therapies involving the destruction of embryos. And nobody opposes fertility clinics. He's got us, right?

Wrong. I don't quite know what Mr. Kinsley knows about the opposition to embryonic stem cell research, but much, if not most, of it comes from Catholic circles. And Catholics who oppose the destruction of embryos in stem-cell research have long opposed the creation and destruction of embryos in fertility clinics. Perhaps Kinsley is ignorant of this; perhaps, he is not and instead hopes to make opposition to embryonic stem cell research look foolish. Who knows? We do know, however, Kinsley's point is not as sharp as he thinks, nor the opposition to embryonic stem cell research foolish. Long before stem cell research became a public issue, many Catholics in the U.S. agreed with Catholic teaching and opposed the creation and destruction of embryos associated with the fertility industry. Plenty of people clearly disagree with the church, but she is consistent on these things.

So, the moral hypocrisy Kinsley claims to find doesn't exist. What of the rest of Kinsley's claims? They prove equally incorrect. He asserts, for instance, that "no other potential therapy — including adult stem cells — is nearly as promising [as embryonic stem cells] for my ailment and others." The "and others" should signal to you the nonsense hidden in this claim. (Kinsley's ailment is Parkinson's.) Kinsley makes here an unspecified and unsubstantiated claim, typical of the claims made by proponents of embryonic stem cell research. Because of the recent fraud involving the South Korean doctor, we should all be wary of these types of claims. Political claims about the therapeutic ability of embryonic stem cells far outstrip current scientific reality. Most such claims are purely theoretical currently and lag behind the actual gains being made with adult stem cells.

Finally, Kinsley makes this shockingly stupid point: "And, by the way, when it



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comes to respecting the human dignity of microscopic embryos, nature — or God — is as cavalier as the most godless fertility clinic. The casual creation and destruction of embryos in normal human reproduction is one reason some people, like me, find it hard to make the necessary leap of faith to believe that an embryo and, say, Nelson Mandela, are equal in the eyes of God." Let me see if I follow his argument: Some people claim embryos are people, it is morally wrong to destroy people, therefore, the "destruction" of embryos is morally wrong. But nature or God "destroys" embryos all the time, (assumed thesis) nature or God cannot act immorally, therefore, the destruction of embryos is not morally wrong. So, Kinsley apparently is willing to grant in this argument that embryos might be people, but believes the destruction of these people permissible since God or nature does it. There are at least two things to say to this. One, God or nature similarly destroys all of us eventually; on the scale either of God (immortal, timeless) or of nature (billions of years) the difference between embryonic life (a day or so) and even adult life (80-90 years) is negligible. So, maybe we should kill Mandela for therapeutic purposes too? Second, obviously, Kinsley apparently doesn't care about the distinction between action and inaction. When you or I die "natural" deaths, or when an embryo perishes, nobody would claim that we were destroyed. When, however, we voluntarily choose to terminate someone's (or even some thing's) life, we speak of destruction. Morality resides precisely at the dividing point between actions for which we have and can claim responsibility, and events that occur beyond our responsibility.

Let's not miss the force of Kinsley's argument. It shows him willing to deny this distinction precisely because he is threatened by Parkinson's. Yet again our culture shows itself ready to sacrifice morality on the altar of self-interest.

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