

Human Life as the *Imago Dei*.

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Peter Singer is an Aussie expatriate and Professor of Ethics at Princeton University. He understands very well where the battle line is. Talking about what he calls the “mistaken belief in the sanctity of human life” he said in an interview in 2006:

The major religions are an obstacle because they teach that humans alone are made in the image of God, humans alone have an immortal soul, God gave us dominion over the animals, and those ideas are an obstacle to treating the animals as we may treat humans.

<http://www.katrinafox.com/petersinger.htm>

Also in 2006 and featured on a Starbuck’s take-away coffee cup was a statement by Wesley J. Smith. The morality of the 21st century will depend on how we respond to this simple but profound question:

Does every human life have equal moral value simply and merely because it is human?

Answer yes, and we have a chance of achieving universal human rights.

Answer no, and it means we are merely another animal in the forest.

It is in the blurring of what it means to be human, the rebellion against what it means to be created in the Image of God, that we are facing humanity’s greatest crisis. When does human life begin and when does it have value? What does it mean to be human?

The answer to this is critical to our thinking with respect to abortion, destructive embryo research, cloning, eugenics and euthanasia. There is reason to believe that what we are facing in the attempted manipulation of life and death is the most significant issue of our time.

Our foundation for the intrinsic value of all human life is in Creation. But we can also argue from that foundation to the person who does not believe in God that we must not degrade or have a lesser view of what it means to be human.

Imagine this conversation with a pro-cloning scientist after all the arguments have been clearly made that there is no need for embryos to be destroyed:

Pro-cloning scientist

“OK, you may have presented us with all the reasons why cloning does not need to happen but we still want to do this research and we don’t want you stopping us.”

Doctor against Cloning

“Our argument then is that you must not do this because it is wrong to create life with the intention of destroying it. All human life matters. In the field of medical science we must not sacrifice one human life for another. The creation of life for destruction is a boundary we must not cross.”

Pro-cloning scientist

“But this is a new frontier of science. Who knows where it would lead. This would be like trying to stop us going to the moon or stopping Columbus finding the new world.”

Doctor against Cloning

“Ah, but we can tell you where it would lead. It would lead to the devaluing of human life. We must have solid boundaries otherwise we open the door to the discarding of human life at any stage depending on the value we attach to it. What the child in the wheelchair brought out to gain sympathy for destructive embryo research does not realise – and, mercifully, could not comprehend – is that it is her life that is ultimately at risk. We must protect the weak and the vulnerable at all stages of existence.”

Pro-cloning scientist

“But they are the ones we want to help by this research.”

Doctor against Cloning

“Really? Then we can do that by using her own cells without sacrificing a fellow traveller. And, as we all know, there are many who call for the elimination of such children while they are still in the womb or even after they have been born. Embryo destruction has the same utilitarian philosophy. We must not go there.”

Pro-cloning scientist

“But if we don’t do this research then we will lose good scientists overseas.”

Doctor against Cloning

“Application of that line of thought would have the effect of forcing all medical ethics to the lowest common denominator. Already there are voices calling for later stage embryos to utilise formed organs. Our own Professor Julian Savulescu in Oxford has called for this. What is unthinkable at one time can become approved in just a very short space of time. This is exactly why we must set absolute boundaries in place. We must go no further.”

In the Beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And we read in those opening words of Genesis that God created man in His Image. Male and female created He them. And God said “be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it; rule over every living creature.” God establishes order and mankind is given the responsibility to see order is done.

In these few words we have the basis of all that we are, all we have, and all that we must do until the King returns. We are created in the Image of God. This brings with it a consciousness of God’s Moral Law that is present in all people even though sometimes it is barely evident. All our creativity, all our ability to love, to rule with justice mixed with mercy is dependent on us having been created in His Image. We are given freedom, but in this freedom we are to be responsible stewards.

But we rebelled. We wanted to be our own gods, to rebel against being created in His Image, to rebel against His law implanted in our hearts, and to spurn the privilege of being stewards of His creation.

We wanted autonomy, self-direction, to eliminate God as much as possible from our society, to render Him unnecessary and be our own gods. To build again the Tower of Babel.

We wanted to tear out His Image and to deny it was ever there, to credit ourselves as the great designers, the great controllers, to reject what it means to be human, to reject the intrinsic value and dignity of every human being, at every stage of life, in every state of disability and dependency, and to take charge of life itself in its creation and destruction.

We have rebelled against God’s Moral Law implanted in our hearts. And we have not done a particularly good job of being stewards of the earth either.

The devaluation of human life, rebelling against what it means to be created in the Image of God, has been especially evident since the beginning of this millennium with destructive embryo research for stem cells.

Issues that have always been before us, but often ignored, were then forced into clear focus: what does it mean to be human, when does human life actually begin, and when is it of value.

Some will argue that human life begins with self-awareness and that it is OK to sacrifice a newborn baby up to 4-6 weeks of age before it becomes self-aware which would make the killing of a cloned baby for its organs acceptable. We instinctively react in horror to that scenario but what about for a greater good e.g. to save the life of another person? And if we say that it is not OK, then why, and at what stage and in what circumstances do we say that life matters? Can we define human life by its potential? Can we define it by the degree of disability?

Biologically human life begins when cells possessing the ability to replicate and differentiate have human chromosomes (whether by fertilisation or cloning or some other method). Such cells are uniquely and unequivocally human with individual chromosomal patterns that determine unique adult characteristics.

We may argue when life has ‘value’ but we may not argue when it begins. Every high school student knows.

And once we get into the question of when life becomes of value and when is that value lost, then we have lost the battle of what it means to be human.

So many arguments and rationalisations for embryo selection can be made in the name of compassion that sound good but however much we like to think that compassion is ‘enough’ in these matters we still

have to consider the implications openly and freely *without this being labelled as condemnation or lack of compassion* – such accusations stifle proper consideration and proper debate.

The real question we have to grapple with is *when does human life become of intrinsic value?* Our position is that it has intrinsic value from the time of fertilisation and it continues until life ends naturally. We must all know this deep inside us and can echo with the designer child: “Mummy, I know you love me and would do anything for me and I thank you for that, but I also know you would have eliminated me if my tissue match had not been ‘right’ in your eyes. Does that mean that I was not of value for who I really was and now *am?*”

Consider further implications. Can a designer child also be created for the ‘cure’ of adult diabetes and if so, up to what age? May a 50-year-old male father a baby for this purpose? Up to what age and for what purposes may designer children be created and who will make such decisions? Should it only be left to the individual to make these decisions? Are there not implications for society?

Are there not also implications in embryo selection for disease and disability? Do we allow selection to eliminate diabetes or high cholesterol from our world? Can we have a perfect world? If the answer is ‘yes’ then surely we should also consider characteristics such as athletic ability – at least because we will have a healthier society with less consequent cost to our health system. Will longevity be a selection criterion? And if so will it be because we consider that living longer is an advantage to society or will we consider it undesirable because of an increased cost to society in terms of caring for our aged?

Even with good intentions the end-of-slope consequences are frightening. But once we push the boundaries evil intentions also become easier to implement. There are lines that must properly be drawn and we must draw them now.

Concepts of value and worth and disability and personhood and self-awareness are too arbitrary and subject to the opinions and whims of the day on which to base decisions regarding life and death. Nations may decide that certain states of mental and physical capacity determine that individual’s right to exist or not exist, and then it may be re-defined to include or exclude varying physical characteristics that are deemed acceptable or of worth to society. That *should* sound terrifyingly familiar.

And if that sounds familiar then what do we need to protect the human race and to protect fundamental human rights that we believe to be self-evident? Well, the nations of the world worked that out in 1948 with the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) to ensure that the atrocities and beliefs that came out of WWII and Nazism *would never be repeated*.

Now in 2004 our own Australian Capital Territory (ACT) – the seat of our capital city Canberra and our Australian Federal Parliament – decided to enact its own [charter](#)¹. Not surprisingly this was modelled on the UDHR and the [International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights](#)² (ICCPR). Commendable it must be. But wait. The ACT charter excludes the *unborn child*.

9 Right to life

- (1) Everyone has the right to life. In particular, no-one may be arbitrarily deprived of life.
- (2) This section applies to a person from the time of birth.

So what have we got here? A section where words like *everyone* and *no-one* are discarded by excluding a whole group of people. If you can so summarily dispose of one group you can do it for another.

In 2006 our state of Victoria also enacted a [charter](#)³. But this excludes *child destruction and abortion*.

48. Savings provision: Nothing in this Charter affects any law applicable to abortion or child destruction,

¹ <http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2004-5/current/pdf/2004-5.pdf>

² <http://www.un.org/millennium/law/iv-4.htm>

³ [http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/f932b66241ecf1b7ca256e92000e23be/54D73763EF9DCA36CA2571B6002428B0/\\$FILE/06-043a.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/LDMS/PubStatbook.nsf/f932b66241ecf1b7ca256e92000e23be/54D73763EF9DCA36CA2571B6002428B0/$FILE/06-043a.pdf)

As we have said the 1948 UDHR was formulated to ensure that the atrocities and beliefs of those preceding horrific years *would never be repeated*. Implicit in the UDHR and spelt out clearly in the 1959 [Declaration of the Rights of the Child](#) is that those rights apply both *before and after birth*, yet both these Charters deliberately exclude the unborn child. It is said that we forget the lessons of history but in this we have blatantly rejected the lessons of history.

How can it be? How can it be that in wanting our own way, in asserting our own autonomy, we so blatantly trash the lessons of history and the future we so compromise. But wait, there's more.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others of the Confessing Church compiled a *Chronicle of Shame* listing the abuses of the Nazi regime. It seems appropriate for us to start doing the same, to label the wrongs and hold them as something for our nations to feel shame. OK, we are not in the same position as they were in the 1930's but there are bridges we have already crossed, absolutes that we have ignored, that will be very difficult to recover.

The loss of shame is not new. I read from Jeremiah 36

It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll (the book of the law), the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes. Jer 36:22-24

In just these few verses we get a glimpse of complacency, arrogance, ignorance and contempt. There is no humility, no respect, no remorse, no fear, and no shame.

Adam and Eve felt shame, but it would appear that Cain did not: *am I my brother's keeper?*

Charles Colson says we have forgotten what shame is.

Ravi Zacharias writes in *Deliver us from Evil – Restoring the Soul in a Disintegrating Culture* that the loss of shame in a society is ultimately an attack upon all of civilisation... shame was given to us as a guardian, not only of ourselves, but of our fellow human beings.

And CSLewis in *The Great Divorce* has one of the characters saying that shame "if you will accept it – if you will drink the cup to the bottom – you will find it very nourishing."

We need to be appalled. As Leon Kass has said *we have forgotten how to shudder*. We need to recover the ability to shudder, to recover our sense of horror and then shame and grief. Kass further writes in *The Wisdom of Repugnance* (1997) "repugnance may be the only voice left that speaks up to defend the central core of our humanity. Shallow are the souls that have forgotten how to shudder".

So let's look at where we have come in Australia.

The Chronicle of Shame

1996: euthanasia laws introduced NT. Now this was vetoed by federal parliament (the so-called Andrew's bill) exercising the federal right to overrule territories. Now with the alliance between Senator Bob Brown and PM Julia Gillard this is back on the agenda with a move to rescind the power of veto thus once again allowing euthanasia in the NT as a very clear part of the agenda. It is not about state's rights and the origin of the ACT at least was never to be a state.

1998: abortion through to 20 weeks in WA; after 20 weeks to a committee.

2002: destructive embryo research on so-called spare embryos mainly for stem-cell research. Now when confronted with the fact that such research had crossed a bridge too far and that this would lead to the deliberate creation of embryos for destructive research Senator Kay Patterson said in 2002

"it is disingenuous (insincere/wrong) to suggest that approving this research will open the door to further killing of living human beings... it is wrong to create human embryos solely for research. It is not morally permissible..."

And then three years later this same senator moves the cloning for research bill. What is it with some politicians? Was this a deliberate deception or tactic or is it an example of incredible naivety? A perfect example of the slippery slope and that there are certain absolutes that must not be ignored. The fact is that that which is unthinkable to one generation becomes acceptable to another. In England they have

approved the mixing of human genes with animal eggs citing the fact that the public are now *more at ease* with the concept. Note the justification – the public are now more at ease with this. This is frightening – we are becoming desensitized to things we would never have contemplated. The slippery slope is real. It is often intentional. Some call it “progress”.

2007: In Victoria according to official government figures [52 aborted babies](#)⁴ were “accidentally” born alive, then left to die. We don’t have later figures but they’re not likely to be less given the change in abortion law. When giving evidence at a Senate select committee I heard another doctor when asked the question “why are these babies left to die” respond with “they weren’t meant to be born alive”.

2008: abortion in Victoria,

- through to term
- by any method
- without anaesthesia for the baby
- up to 24 weeks for no reason
- after 24 weeks as long as 1 doctor other than the abortionist agrees
- free eugenic selection including the recent case of aborting twin boys because the parents wanted a girl. Eugenic selection includes readily correctable abnormalities such as cleft lip. 90%+ babies with Down Syndrome are aborted.
- compulsion of doctors to refer.

Not only has Victoria passed the most liberal abortion laws in Australia but in that legislation is the [Section 8](#) provision to force doctors – even when such is against their deeply held convictions and conscience – to refer for abortion when asked by a patient. To my knowledge no Western government since Nazi Germany has compelled doctors to participate in what they believe to be evil.

(1) If a woman requests a registered health practitioner to advise on a proposed abortion, or to perform, direct, authorise or supervise an abortion for that woman, and the practitioner has a conscientious objection to abortion, the practitioner must-

- (a) inform the woman that the practitioner has a conscientious objection to abortion; and
- (b) refer the woman to another registered health practitioner in the same health profession who the practitioner knows does not have a conscientious objection to abortion.

Now it is one thing to pass a law that permits evil but it is something more to pass a law that compels evil.

How serious is this overriding of conscience?

The overriding of conscience violates a non-derogable right – one that cannot be overridden even in national emergency in the *International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights*. Section 8 even violates Victoria’s own Charter of Rights⁵.

And we will talk more about this tomorrow.

So where are we going? How bad can it get? Complete autonomy is what is wanted.

Ludwig Minelli head of *Dignitas International* claims that suicide and assisted suicide are human rights and then argues

If the Right to Suicide is a Human Right... we must accept that, in order to make use of this right, there must be no legal requirements other than that the person has the mental capacity needed to decide to end his or her own life. Any conditions which insisted that somebody must be terminally or severely ill would interfere with the essence of that Human Right. Human Rights are, inherently, unconditional.

[Assisted Suicide Backers Mislead the Public](#)⁶ by Wesley J. Smith August 11, 2008, Life News.com

Dr Philip Nitschke argues that anyone – even troubled teens – should have the right to kill themselves:

⁴ http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ccopmm/downloads/ccopmm_annrep07.pdf

⁵ <http://www.chooselifeaustralia.org.au/life/a-new-dark-age/>

<http://www.chooselifeaustralia.org.au/life/one-more-thing-%E2%80%93-the-victorian-pathway-to-a-new-dark-age/>

⁶ <http://www.lifenews.com/2008/08/11/bio-2542/>

...all people qualify, not just those with the training, knowledge, or resources to find out how to "give away" their life. And someone needs to provide this knowledge, training, or recourse necessary to anyone who wants it, including the depressed, the elderly bereaved, the troubled teen.

*National Review Online*⁷, 5 June 2001.

And in *Killing Me Softly* he writes: "dying will become democratized. This heightened level of autonomy will open up new choices to the ordinary person" [The Australian, Aug 7](#)

How bad can it get? Where could we be going? Imagine this...

- "de-selection" of embryos, mature fetuses and late term unborn babies for reasons of eugenic selection of all disease or defect
 - And mothers who object are labelled – as they are labelled now in UK if they object to selective abortion of a fetus with a possible abnormality – as 'genetic outlaws' and 'how dare they bring this financial impost on the community?'
 - Bioethicist Ben Mitchell said that "if (male)unborn children are being eliminated for a genetic disposition to autism, no one is safe . . . Today autism, tomorrow intelligence below 70 I.Q., the next day male pattern baldness. When will this madness stop?"
- the imperfect newborn is also "de-selected" before self-awareness ("personhood" a la Peter Singer) up to about 4-6 weeks of age
 - Now before you say that's impossible, consider that some babies that are aborted because of suspected abnormalities are subsequently found completely normal and have been aborted "unnecessarily". This of course is regarded as being undesirable and so it has been said that banning infanticide unfairly discriminates against the normal child by forcing an abortion when abnormality is suspected but not proven. The logic is that if infanticide was legal then we could allow the baby to be born and be properly examined before making the decision to terminate it. So there are two reasons for supporting the legalization of infanticide – we can then be sure of the diagnosis and the baby gets the benefit of anaesthetic. And then we can also use good organs for transplant purposes. Yeah, right...
- organs are taken from cloned fetuses bred for the purpose of transplantation (as far as I know this is legally permissible in New Jersey)
 - This is argued by one of our expatriates Oxford Professor Julian Savulescu
"Indeed, it is not merely morally permissible but morally required that we employ cloning to produce embryos or fetuses for the sake of providing cells, tissues or even organs for therapy" Should we clone human beings? Cloning as a source of tissue for transplantation. *Journal of Medical Ethics* 25.2 (April 1999): p87.
- harvesting organs from patients with catastrophic cognitive impairments
- physician assisted suicide is routine and expected
- euthanasia and PAS is readily available for non-dying people, even for existential distress in teenagers, and extended to the involuntary
- funding will be limited (as it is in Oregon) for palliative care treatment in favour of PAS
- upon reaching a certain age assessments are made of usefulness to society
- doctors will not be able to access training positions in obstetrics or anaesthesia unless they agree to participate in abortions
- doctors will not be able to access training positions in paediatrics, aged care, palliative care, or oncology unless they agree to euthanasia as part of that care
- doctors will become un-insurable by medical defence organizations unless they agree beforehand to participate in these things
- doctors will be de-registered and unable to practice if they refuse to perform such procedures that become legal
- clinical disciplines of paediatrics, O&G, anaesthesia, geriatrics, and oncology will be taken up only by doctors who are prepared to compromise on the value of life
- infanticide will be legalised for "abnormalities"

CSLewis in the series of three lectures presented in 1943 at Durham University and then presented in a book titled *The Abolition of Man* foresees the consequences of education without values. He talks about 'men without chests' or adults who lack moral formation and character, who divorce their head from their hearts, who use their 'head' but lose their 'chest.' Lewis writes:

'In a sort of ghastly simplicity we... make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise.

We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.

'Stepping outside (the moral values), they have stepped into the void. Nor are their subjects necessarily unhappy men. They are not men at all: they are artefacts. Man's final conquest has been the abolition of man.'

⁷ <http://old.nationalreview.com/interrogatory/interrogatory060501.shtml>

I said at the beginning that, in the rebellion of what it means to be created in the Image of God, we are facing *humanity's greatest crisis*. It is in fact a rejection of who God is and all that He has created – it is rebellion.

Society's greatest risk is the threat to marriage and family, the move to re-define male and female and thus ultimately destroy the fabric of society and we know the origin of that threat.

And the third great risk is to freedom of belief and to speak of what we believe, which includes freedom of religion and liberty of conscience and that brings us to medicine's greatest challenge.

You will find these three core elements as the basis of the [Manhattan Declaration](#), the [Westminster Declaration](#) and the [Canberra Declaration](#).

Now the final result of the rebellion of what it means to be created in the Image of God is *The Culture of Death*.

The Culture of Death

A culture where choosing to die and the killing of others is seen as a solution for misery.

A culture where some lives are seen as more worthy than others.

Ultimately the culture of death is a society where personal autonomy is exercised in rebellion against an intrinsic sanctity of life.

A culture that accepts the killing of countless thousands of un-born children every year the vast majority of which in our western world are for reasons of maternal choice and seen as an extension of contraception.

A culture in which it becomes progressively easier to think of, then justify, then carry out “mercy” killing, firstly on the person who requests it and then to relieve the suffering of others for whom it is considered their suffering to be incompatible with quality of life.

A culture that accepts without thinking the elimination of embryos and killing of the un-born that are less than perfect – e.g. Down Syndrome, or even easily correctable abnormalities such as cleft lip.

A culture in which the intrinsic value of all human life is increasingly replaced by an objective assessment for the individual, then for society. We have then come to the point – where we have been before – in evaluating whether a life is worthy to be lived.

A culture that accepts that cloning human beings is OK as long as we don't implant them and they are destroyed before 14 days.

A culture that accepts that it is OK to create human life for the sole purpose of research that will result in the death of that life.

A culture that accepts the mixing of animal genetic material with human even though any “life” thus created would also be destroyed before 14 days.

A culture where normal embryos are discarded because they are deemed unsuitable for tissue donation to an existing sibling or other relative.

A culture where society expects and the individual – particularly the elderly and infirm – feels a Duty to Die because it is better for their relatives or for society.

A culture in which it becomes progressively easier to consider the value of one human life compared with another, where it becomes thinkable to transplant organs necessary for life to function from a person

inevitably close to death – or even subject to capital punishment – to the premature termination of that life when it is considered to be of lesser value or “unworthy” or to no longer exhibit “personhood”.

Note that in this progression, having departed from the absolute – the intrinsic value or sanctity of all human life – we adopt criteria capable of varying definition: mercy; suffering; quality of life; value of life; proximity of death; personhood. These definitions vary from person to person (consistent with living in a society with recognition of autonomy), from society to society, and from government to government.

Personhood of the mature embryo is also dependent on the mother’s view – even a changing view – as to whether the baby is wanted. If, after an abortion procedure, the baby is (accidentally) born alive then, as it is no longer wanted by the mother, it should not *be* alive and it is therefore justifiable somehow to put “it” on one side until it dies.

Similarly, there is the obvious inconsistency – with obvious disregard for any acceptance of the yet-to-be-born baby as a person – between chosen abortion and the baby being killed in utero through an attack or an accident involving the mother, such distinction being accepted by some courts in bringing to justice the persons responsible for the attack or accident, compared with the total lack of accusation if it was the mother’s choice.

It is indeed a *culture of death* when it not only becomes a *right to die* at any chosen point along the life-span for any chosen reason – a philosophy that is already apparent in some parts of our society and in our young people *if things get too hard, I’ll just kill myself* – but also to insist on assistance in that by the medical profession and to have legislative backing.

And we haven’t to this point even looked at the issue of foetal pain and the various methods of abortion.

British researchers in 2006 (<http://www.lifenews.com/nat2191.html>) concluded that premature babies around 20 weeks did actually feel pain when withdrawing their feet with heel prick rather than this just being a reflex action. To pretend that a 32-week unborn infant does not feel that stab of the scissors in the back of the neck prior to its brain being scrambled and then sucked out in that most ghastly of procedures the so-called partial-birth abortion is mind-boggling in its denial. Can we be certain that an 18-week unborn child does not feel excruciating pain when it is ripped limb from limb to extract it?

Add to all this the threat that is already with us that doctors who, for reasons of conscience, will not offer services that are legally permitted should not be doctors and we have a culture that not only insists on death on demand as a moral and legal right, but also where doctors refusing to assist are liable to de-registration.

And that brings us to tomorrow morning’s topic of defending liberty of conscience.

Let CSLewis have the last word.

...It is the magician’s bargain: give up our soul, get power in return. But once our souls, that is, our selves, have been given up, the power thus conferred will not belong to us. We shall in fact be the slaves and puppets of that to which we have given our souls... if man chooses to treat himself as raw material, raw material he will be: not raw material to be manipulated, as he fondly imagined, by himself, but by his dehumanised Conditioners. CSLewis: *The Abolition of Man*.

Lachlan Dunjey. Brisbane, June 2011.
