

prosecution for late abortion

are activists and the media out of touch with the public?



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In June, Carla Foster was sentenced to 28 months' imprisonment 'for the offence of administering poison with intent to procure a miscarriage'.¹

Ms Foster had knowingly lied in phone calls to a BPAS clinic in 2020, claiming she was less than eight weeks pregnant, and thereby procuring abortion pills through the post. This occurred during the UK's first Covid lockdown, shortly after the law had changed allowing women to receive pills for an early medical abortion (up to ten weeks) without having to visit a clinic for a scan. In fact, Ms Foster was between 32 and 34 weeks pregnant. Her baby, Lily, was not breathing when she was born, and was pronounced dead by paramedics called to attend the birth.

Far from being distraught at this baby's death and calling on the Government and abortion clinics to ensure such a tragedy never happened again, the predominant cry in the media was for the complete decriminalisation of abortion.² A look at the comments on those articles that published these calls, however, reveals a different story. Almost all commenters agree that 32-34 weeks is too late to abort, based mainly on the baby's viability outside the womb. Many state that it is right that there should be legal consequences for women who exceed the 24-week limit. A YouGov Tracker Poll, following the public views on this since 2019, found in June that 47 per cent of the public think the 24-week limit should remain, and 21 per cent that it should be lowered. Just ten per cent said the time limit should be increased.³ It seems the media is out of step with public opinion on this occasion.

Downing Street has said it has no plans to change the law: 'Through the Abortion Act, all women have access to safe abortions on the NHS up to 24 weeks...We think this approach provides the right balance and... there are no plans to change this.'⁴ ●

moral flip-flopping over doctors & the death penalty

full story at cmf.li/3L4Lk0p



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Those who advocate for euthanasia yet oppose capital punishment have a morally untenable position. Why is it that doctors who refuse to administer death as a punishment on ethical grounds are content to agree that they can administer it as a mercy?

The drug cocktails used for administering death by euthanasia or capital punishment are pretty much identical (sodium thiopental had been used to induce unconsciousness, followed by pancuronium bromide to paralyse respiratory muscles, and potassium bromide to induce cardiac arrest). In 2016, following sustained pressure from campaigners in the United States, UK manufacturers ceased supplying it from the UK to the US. Though protocols vary between countries where assisted dying by euthanasia is legal, the cocktail of drugs used is very similar to those used in executions in prisons. Advocates for euthanasia readily acknowledge that 'execution by lethal injection mirrors euthanasia in the Netherlands and often uses the same drug combinations'.

The majority of ethicists considers that executing people is a violation of a doctor's ethical code and that administering a lethal cocktail in such circumstances is not permissible. If it is wrong for doctors to administer lethal injections for the death penalty, how can it be defensible to administer the same for euthanasia? Campaigners argue that the difference is one of choice.

Many jurisdictions where euthanasia has been legalised have found it almost impossible to restrict it to the terminally ill, in part because terminal illness can be so unpredictable. Indeed, the suffering of those

who want to die but are not in the final months of death is likely to be much greater over time, as natural death is likely to be a long time off. The following two criminal cases demonstrate an ethical dilemma, when a prisoner, in effect requests to die via capital punishment.

In February 2023, Genevieve Lhermitte, a Belgian mother convicted in 2008 of the murder of her five children aged between three and 14, was euthanised at her own request. She was serving a life sentence for her children's murders, so it is not difficult to envisage that imprisonment for, and guilt from, such a heinous crime might well lead to 'unbearable' mental suffering. Belgium's law for euthanasia allows people to choose to die if they are considered to be suffering from 'unbearable' psychological, as well as physical, suffering that is beyond healing.

Previously, similar requests from prisoners in Belgium had been denied. In 2015 Frank van Den Bleeken, a serial killer and rapist who, after serving 30 years of his life sentence, requested euthanasia on the same grounds as Genevieve Lhermitte. His request was originally granted, but due to lack of medical staff willing to undertake the procedure, the then Belgian justice minister, Koen Geens, announced instead that van Den Bleeken would be transferred to the Netherlands. The sisters of Van Den Bleeken's last victim opposed his euthanasia request, seeing euthanasia as his attempt to escape justice.

Flip-flopping over the issue is a sign of moral inconsistency. Perhaps the inconsistency is necessary because doctors actually violate their ethical code by deliberately administering a lethal injection to anyone – even if at their request? ●

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'of mice and men'

full story at cmf.li/40AVKdv



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A Japanese team announced at the Third International Summit on Human Genome Editing in 2023, that they had successfully produced healthy mice pups from two male mice using a surrogate female mouse for gestation only, and not as a source of eggs. A different team attempted a similar experiment over five years ago; using two female mice from whom healthy pups were born. However, those derived from two male mice died after a few days.

In 2006, Takahashi and Yamanaka showed that adult somatic cells could be induced to become stem cells (induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs)). These iPSCs are capable of developing into any type of adult cell, including gametes. It was only a matter of time before offspring from same sex parents were produced in laboratory animals.

The innovation that enabled the reproduction of healthy pups from two males in this breakthrough exploited the natural tendency of iPSCs in culture to spontaneously lose chromosomes, including the Y chromosome. The scientists treated such cells with reversine, which promotes errors in chromosomal distribution during cell division. This then led to the presence of female cells, with two X chromosomes, which could be used to form egg cells, which were fertilised with mouse sperm and implanted into surrogate mothers.

Only seven pups were born from over 600 fertilised eggs. This low success rate illustrates the inefficiency of the procedure. Typically, dozens of healthy pups would be expected from over 600 conventional eggs.

Unsurprisingly, this prompted speculation that male gay couples would be able, within the next ten years or so, to have children genetically related to both men. Many press reports failed to mention that there remained a need for a surrogate mother; other reporters speculated that developments in ectogenesis (see my earlier blog on 'pod babies' in the spring 2023

edition of *Triple Helix*) would eventually render surrogate motherhood redundant.

Most high-income societies with the technological ability to employ such techniques decided decades ago that same-sex parenting of children was socially and ethically acceptable. Generating children genetically related to both same-sex parents is the logical next step.

Many cures promised from similar, previous overhyped 'advances', such as the creation of animal-human hybrids and mitochondrial donation techniques, have,

as yet failed to materialise. One of the major ethical issues with this latest announcement is the potential waste of millions of pounds on developing a technique that works in some non-human species but is not transferable to humans. If it proves transferable, Christians and all people of faith will need to recognise that same-sex parenting is nothing new. The day in 2008 that the HFEA succeeded in removing any regard for 'the need of a father' to obtain IVF paved the way for two mothers to parent and now, ironically, for two fathers as well. •

when is a 'synthetic' embryo a real embryo?

full story at cmf.li/3NYNVuP



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Research has shown that it is possible to manufacture embryonic stem cell-derived embryos (ESCDEs). One year ago, a team were able to grow an ESCDE, made from mouse cells, in utero for 8.5 days post fertilisation. In February 2023, scientists were able to grow stem-cell-derived human blastocyst-like entities termed '*blastoids*', which replicated the process of implantation into endometrial organoids. A similar feat was reported using cynomolgus monkeys in April, with a few surviving to day 17. Those that were implanted into a uterus triggered hormonal changes in the surrogate mother producing gestational sacs. It is possible that this research could result in a way of bypassing present legal time limits and ethical concerns on embryo research, as suggested in a recent article in *Nature*.

The 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act imposes a 14-day limit on experimentation on human embryos. With the advent of this and other research showing it is possible to grow human embryos in vitro for longer periods, there has been pressure on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) to seek powers to make such access less restricted.

Questions that arise include: Are human blastoids sufficiently like human embryos to be subject to the same time limit? From a Christian point of view, are these

synthetic creations actually embryos?

David Jones presciently pointed out two years ago, that an embryo is a human being in the process of development. If it does prove possible to generate fully-developed, non-human animals from blastoids, then the distinction between a synthetic blastoid and a real embryo will blur, and the ethical and legal issues related to experimentation with both will need to be the same. The danger is that the laws will be relaxed rather than the remit widened.

Unbelievers may well opine that '*the smallest advance in biology generates large and horror-struck claims of playing God, of eugenics, or of worse*'. Christians, however, along with others who reject a materialist worldview, will inevitably speculate about how 'ensoulment' relates to the development of an adult from a human blastoid, should this ever occur.

This question is not new. In 2008, it was rightly signposted that '*Advances in stem cell research may be provoking a kind of "God of the Gaps" retreat on the moral status of embryos*'. The advent of blastoids does not necessarily raise any new questions in this respect. Do we really understand the science implicit in the scriptural assertion that God breathed human life into inanimate clay (Genesis 2:7)? Theological disputes about ensoulment are far from new and still retain a place in debate in clinical journals. •