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Therapeutic cloning: the moral status of embryos



Box 7.1 Activity: Evaluating arguments

In this chapter we shall be subjecting the following argument to logical analysis.

Argument one

Premise one: It is wrong to kill one of us.

Premise two: The early embryo is one of us.

Premise three: In therapeutic cloning the early embryo is killed.

Conclusion: Therefore therapeutic cloning is wrong.

Participants might like to discuss this argument informally before we start to evaluate it more formally.



Box 7.6 Activity: Conceptual analysis

Utilitarians reject the idea that rules like ‘do not lie’ and ‘do not kill’ are moral absolutes. Does this mean that utilitarians are not moral absolutists?

Answer: No. Utilitarians believe that ‘produce the greatest happiness of the greatest number’ (the greatest happiness principle) is true everywhere, for everyone, whether or not they believe it. This means that utilitarians believe that the GHP is true absolutely.



Box 7.7 Activity: Finding counterexamples

If argument two is invalid there must be a counterexample. Can you find one?

Answer: The counterexample that proves conclusively that this argument is invalid is the situation in which therapeutic cloning promotes the GHGN.



Box 7.8 Activity: Small group discussion

Divide participants into three smaller groups. Each group should take one of the situations described above, and try to construct a case *against* the claim that the action described would promote the GHGN.

The groups will need to consider the effect on the utilitarian calculus of:

- how many people's happiness will be affected by the killing;
- the chances of the killings being carried out in secret so the happiness of those not involved needn't be counted;
- claiming that action is right only when no one knows about it.



Box 7.9 Activity: Essay writing

We should reject utilitarianism because it doesn't take rights seriously enough.

We should reject deontology because no moral claim is absolutely true.

Participants should choose one of these claims and examine it in a maximum of 2,000 words. In the essay they should:

- briefly describe the theory they're considering;
- explain the problem posed for that theory, in particular explaining why it is a problem for the theory;
- consider at least one objection to the claim that this is a problem;
- come to their own considered opinion, giving reasons for it.

It is not necessary to come down on one side or another but it is necessary to defend the position embraced even if this is the fence-sitting position.



Box 7.10 Activity: Paired discussion

There are many different lists of the virtues that virtue ethicists believe a virtuous person must have. Here is a list given by the BBC website on virtue ethics:⁷

The traditional list of cardinal virtues was:

Prudence

Justice

Fortitude/Bravery

Temperance

The modern theologian James F. Keenan suggests:

Justice

Justice requires us to treat all human beings equally and impartially.

Fidelity

Fidelity requires that we treat people closer to us with special care.

Self-care

We each have a unique responsibility to care for ourselves, affectively, mentally, physically and spiritually.

Prudence

The prudent person must always consider justice, fidelity and self-care.

The prudent person must always look for opportunities to acquire more of the other three virtues.

In pairs, or as a whole group, participants should discuss whether a virtuous person would think therapeutic cloning accords with the virtues.



Box 7.13 Activity: Analysing arguments

Read Chapter 5, pages 64–67 on how to set out an argument logic-book style, and page 60 on the fallacy of begging the question. Then set out Bailey's argument logic-book style, showing how it begs the question.

Answer: Here is Bailey's argument set out logic-book style:

Premise one: The early embryo is just a bundle of cells.

Premise two: No bundle of cells has the right to life.

Conclusion: Therefore the early embryo does not have the right to life.

Premise two is italicised because it is a *suppressed* premise: Bailey assumes it but doesn't make it explicit. This suppressed premise begs the question that we are trying to answer.



Box 7.17 Activity: Conceptual analysis

Are therapeutic cloning and abortion morally equivalent? If so, then if therapeutic cloning is morally acceptable so is abortion (and vice versa).

Can you identify a position on which we might consistently think abortion is wrong, whilst thinking therapeutic cloning is not wrong?

Answer: two beliefs are consistent if they can both be true at the same time. It is consistent to believe both that therapeutic cloning is acceptable because the embryo is killed before the 14th day, and that abortion is unacceptable because it takes place at some point after the 14th day.



Box 7.18 Activity: Small group discussion

Divide participants into three groups and allocate to each group one of the arguments against the claim that the potential for becoming a human being suffices for the status of a human being. Their task is to see if they can get around this argument.

Each group should appoint a spokesperson to report back, the discussion can then be opened to the whole group.



Box 7.19 Activity: Personal reflection

Before the 14th day it cannot reasonably be claimed that the embryo is a human being, therefore it is not one of us.

The early embryo has the potential to become a human being from the moment of syngamy, therefore even before the 14th day it is one of us.

Identify the position towards which you tend. Then consider carefully the arguments *against* it without creating any straw men (see Chapter 5, Box 5.8).