

Analyzing Abortion: No Piece of Cake

By Gary P. Posner, M.D.

Make no mistake. I favor a woman's right to choose, for any reason at all prior to viability and for any alarming medical condition (fetal or maternal) thereafter. And before that pesky DNA testing came along and disclosed how so many accused had been so wrongly adjudicated, I once favored liberal use of the death penalty for capital-crime-convicted bastards.

But my affinity for bitches began at a far more tender age. I couldn't wait for the school day to end so that I could play with my childhood miniature poodle. She helped teach me the virtues of love, loyalty, and responsibility. In return (and I may have gotten the better of this deal), she learned from me, after my very first painfully high toss across our backyard, the wisdom of letting a tennis ball bounce once before jumping to catch it. The largest of a pedigreed show dog's litter, it was quickly apparent that she would grow too big to ever compete and was thus available to my family at a discount. Were the technology such that the breeder could have instead selectively terminated her in utero, PETA (had it existed at the time) would have no doubt been chagrined over such casual killing of canine life.

At that age, long before the great frog decline, my friends and I thought nothing of catching tadpoles and taking them home in bottles, only to have them die in a matter of days. Though we snatched them from the neighborhood creek rather than from nonexistent froggie amniotic fluid, this was tantamount to fetal frog abortion, and I suspect PETA would have frowned upon our thoughtless taking of amphibian life.

Which, of course, brings us to — you guessed it — kangaroos. While still about the size of a small lima bean, the developing fetus transits from the mother's innards into her external pouch for the remainder of gestation. Suppose these 'roo babies were believed to possess aphrodisiac properties, making them prized pick-pocketing poacher prey. Would PETA consider such seizures no more objectionable than sneakily shearing someone's sheep, or would it strenuously object to this senseless snuffing of marsupial life?

Which now logically leads directly to — right again — this Einsteinian thought experiment. Imagine a wormhole, not connecting two widely separated regions of outer space but rather a 10-week-pregnant woman's uterus and stomach. Pressing her "outie" three times while chanting "Roe, Roe, Roe" initiates an instantaneous transport/abort from point A to point B, such that her strawberry-sized fetus now resides in her corrosively acidic gastric chamber. Also imagine, in an adjacent chair, woman #2, whose own interdimensional passageway bridges the gap in spacetime between *her* empty stomach and the poodle uterus containing my gestating childhood pet. After pressing *her* belly button *five* times while muttering "They eat dogs in China," you know what's now about to be digested within *her* gut. At this point, imagine Ms. PETA being invited into the room to hear what has just transpired. Though fanciful, if she thought she could pull off a pup-in-progress rescue by reaching elbow deep into esophagus #2, I suspect she'd try it in a heartbeat.

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More appetizingly, let's now ponder a "bun in the oven." Better yet, let's bake one from scratch! Combine one egg (ovum) with the other vital ingredient (semen), and pop the mixture into the oven (uterus), which has been modestly preheated to — naturally — womb temperature. As you periodically peek (ultrasound) to check the status of your developing "bun," does it appear to be part of the "oven," or an entity with its own identity?

Though slightly varying versions of the following quote permeate the Internet, Einstein is said to have once commented, "If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question I could solve the problem in less than five minutes." The preceding has been our 55 minutes, and a life may indeed be at stake. The pregnant question: Is a "bun in the oven" merely part of a woman's own body, or is it a unique individual? If the answer isn't obvious on its face (or other body parts), that pesky DNA once again proves revelatory. Its dispassionate verdict: "Unique individual human life."

Abortion absolutists often view this issue, particularly late-term, with eyes wide shut, invoking invective in lieu of open-minded analysis. I'm no Einstein, but even though I empathize with those demanding a woman's right to have her cake (or bun) and eat it too, I recognize that there may be something not quite right about that right.

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