

# Calling cells people doesn't make it so

In four years of writing this column, I've never written about abortion. I hoped I wouldn't have to. But next week's election changes the picture. I urge citizens of Colorado to vote no on Amendment 48. A blastocyte is not a person. Voting can't make it so. It can, however, make our state a worse place to live.

I'm very familiar with the arguments behind 48. Life is sacred. Science says life begins at conception. Somebody needs to speak for the fetus. If abortion remains legal, we will eventually become a society that exterminates the mentally and physically inferior, followed eventually by the end of morality and the lack of respect for all life anywhere.

None of these arguments is compelling. All are outweighed by the terrible consequences of requiring the law to treat a zygote like a human being.

The reason abortion is controversial is not because the devil is at work in the world. Nor is it because people choose to complicate a simple issue.

The reason is very simple: To people not already convinced by faith, it is not self-evident that an embryo deserves the same legal status as a person. That's really all there is to it.

After all, can something be called a person if it can only survive inside an adult human? What if it has no brain waves? No emotions? No ability to feel pain? Does a person die when a collection of cells is expelled from a woman, solely because her body unconsciously detected that something was wrong? Why do we call that "miscarriage," and not "accidental death"?

I am sorry to be so direct, as these words will offend some readers. While I mean every one of them, I am also a father of two who was present at the birth of his children. I share every parent's sense of the wonder and joy of how new life is brought into the world.

That sense, I think, ought to lead us to the right understanding of Amendment 48. An embryo is not a person, but neither is it mere protoplasm. It is a potential person.

What is it, then, that turns a potential person into an actual person, one deserving of protection under the law? I would suggest that it is the love of the one on whom its life depends, and her desire to bring it into the world.



OPINION

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COLUMNIST

This isn't exactly unprecedented. Love and nurturing are what enable all of us to become fully human. People who do not receive it behave like frightened or angry animals, and are often exhibit animal-like behavior.

It is also consistent with the genuine love that I believe many backers of Amendment 48 feel for each and every aborted fetus. They see potential persons as actual persons because of their love. They know that it is love that makes the difference.

But the proper response under such circumstances is persuasion, not force. Persuade women to love their unwanted fetuses enough to carry them to term. It's a free country, the First Amendment protects your right to talk.

In fact, armed with the courage of your convictions, you can treat all embryos inside you as people. When it comes to your uterus, you can make Amendment 48 the law of the land. Who knows, that might get you a vice presidential nomination.

But extending that purely theological-based view to other women who don't share it goes too far. It would make women mere breeding hosts for potential persons, it would send desperate women underground when they need lawful, quality care the most, and it would create a horrible bureaucratic and legal quagmire from which society would never recover.

Someday, technology will solve this problem. With enough time and research, we'll be able to transfer potential persons out of the bodies of the women who don't want them into the bodies of those who do. If the pro-life movement would spend a tenth of the money on embryo transplantation research that it currently spends trying to ban abortion, that day will come a lot sooner.

But until then, we must live with the imperfections of a world where potential persons can come into being in the bodies of women who may not want them there. The decision of what to do next must rest with them. Vote no on Amendment 48.

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