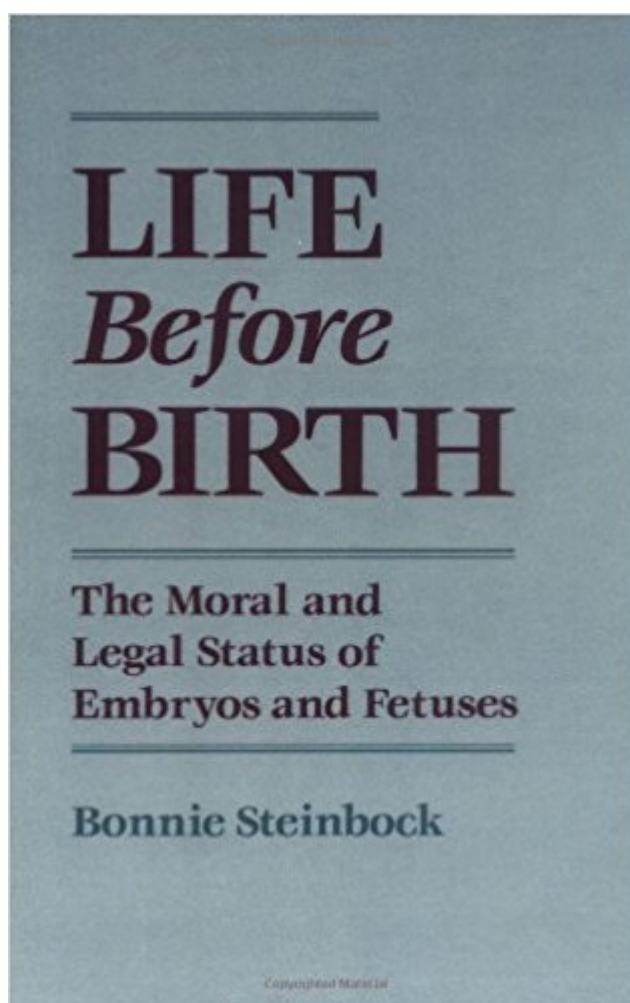


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Life Before Birth: The Moral And Legal Status Of Embryos And Fetuses



Synopsis

Hardly a day passes without newspaper coverage of some new development regarding prenatal life. The abortion debate continues to rage, but other examples abound: forced Caesareans; prosecutions of women for drug use during pregnancy; fetal protection policies; the use of fetal tissue for transplantation; embryo research; and the disposition of frozen embryos. All of these issues raise the question of the moral status of the unborn: are embryos and fetuses part of the pregnant woman or are they persons? Are they sources of tissue, research tools, or are they pre-born children? Different conceptions of the unborn prevail in different contexts, giving rise to the charge of inconsistency. For example, women have been criminally charged with abusing their fetuses by using drugs during pregnancy, even though abortion--which pro-lifers call the ultimate child abuse--is legal. The legalization of abortion itself was based in part on the unborn's never having been recognized in law as a full legal person. Yet fetuses have been considered as persons for the purposes of insurance coverage, wrongful death suits, and vehicular homicide. This book provides a framework for thinking clearly and coherently about the unborn. The first chapter elaborates the book's basic idea, that all and only beings who have interests have moral standing, and only beings who possess conscious awareness have interests. This thesis, which is called "the interest view," raises issues of considerable philosophical complexity, but is presented in language non-philosophers will be able to understand. Subsequent chapters apply the interest view, and explore the moral and legal aspects of a wide range of issues, including abortion, the legal status of the fetus outside abortion, maternal-fetal conflict, fetal research, and the use and disposition of extracorporeal embryos resulting from the new reproductive technologies. The philosophical discussion is enlivened by examples and actual cases which immediately catch, and sustain, the reader's interest. Written in a lively style, *Life Before Birth: The Moral and Legal Status of Embryos and Fetuses* is a timely and important work that enables us to resolve contradictions in our current thinking about the unborn, and to approach new issues in a clear and rational manner.

Book Information

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"Bonnie Steinbock's excellent book is . . . consistent, thoroughgoing, and intelligible."

--Nature"Steinbock's book is valuable for all interested in the ethical/legal issues surrounding abortion, prenatal injury and liability, maternal-fetal conflict, and fetal/embryo research. The author provides an excellent historical overview of these issues, but she also addresses the issues from the stance of a particular theory of moral status, namely, interest theory. This gives coherence to her discussion as well as allowing testing of the viability of interest theory." --Choice"Steinbock's analysis is helpful to physicians, their patients, and even lawyers. . . . she makes a persuasive case, her theoretical framework helps to clarify and resolve many difficulties currently surrounding the unborn. Through her analytic alchemy, decisions concerning these complex issues are transformed into the moral and legal equivalents of a piece of cake. Hard on occasion, to be sure--sometimes even downright unpalatable--but ultimately digestible." --The Lancet"A focused, lucid, analytically fine-grained discussion of a wide variety of problems. . . extremely useful as a survey of the current state of the debate." --Religious Studies Review"Makes an excellent contribution. The use of the interest view works well to provide a coherent framework for analysis, meticulous research is evident, and applications for individual cases as well as policy implications are present throughout. This thoughtful work should be highly constructive in the "unborn" debates and decisions that lie ahead." --Health Affairs"Merits serious consideration by physicians. Steinbock's interests-based approach treats all questions as open -- another and most welcome breath of fresh air." --Laurence B. McCullough, Ph.D., NEJM"An extremely valuable contribution to the literature. The author carefully identifies the many bioethical issues to which the status of embryos and fetuses is relevant....She thoroughly reviews the extensive medical, bioethical, and legal literature on all of these issues, offering well-developed critiques of many standard positions. She articulates and thoughtfully defends interesting positions on all of these topics. Anyone with an interest in these issues will learn a great deal from her knowledgeable and judicious treatment of them." --Baruch A, Brody, PhD, Baylor College of Medicine, The Journal of Clinical Ethics"An important new book..."

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