

The Catholic Church teaches unequivocally that “human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception.”² If fertilization brings substantial change and the zygote formed is both alive and human—facts accessible to both philosophical and scientific analysis—a soul is present because the soul is the principle of life in a material body and the form of the body.^{3,4}

Guenin’s reference to the Vatican document *Donum Vitae* is misleading. That document does not teach that a person is a genome. It also does not teach that a person is a union of body and soul because this would preclude angelic persons and the 3 Persons of the Trinity. The classic definition of Boethius is “*persona est naturae rationalis individua substantia*,” a person is an individual substance of a rational nature.⁵ Actually, since person denotes a “who,” not a “what,” a person cannot be subject to strict definition, which refers only to the “whatness” of a thing. *Donum Vitae* explicitly affirms the human person as a substantial union of body and spiritual soul, the immediate creation of the spiritual soul of each human person by God, and the inviolability of the human person from the moment of conception. It also explicitly (and presciently) rejects the argument from nonenablement.⁶

Perhaps realizing the weakness of his argument, Guenin buttresses it with references to the embryo not being sentient or capable of forming preferences and adopting ends, thus confusing the actualization of various potencies with the underlying nature in which such potencies are grounded. He also buttresses it with references to the relief of human suffering, which is actually the utilitarian defense of embryo use he previously (and properly) rejected, a variant of the Machiavelian principle that the end justifies the means—a principle covertly or overtly embraced by today’s brave new world of bioethicists. According to Guenin, “Therefore nothing that we might do to an epidosembryo can cause it discomfort or frustrate it.” I would submit that killing is the ultimate frustration for the victim.

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1. Guenin LM. The morality of unenabled embryo use—arguments that work and arguments that don’t. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2004;79:801-808.

2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference; 2000.

3. Aristotle. *De Anima (On the Soul): The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Barnes J, ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; 1984.

4. Denzinger H. *Enchiridion Symbolorum (The Sources of Catholic Dogma)*. Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications; 1955.

5. Tixeront J. *History of Dogmas*. Westminster, Md: Christian Classics; 1984.

6. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Donum Vitae*. Vatican City; 1987.

To the Editor: In general, it is not possible to espouse any position that is truly free of bias, including the one I shall mention at the end of this letter. That is certainly true of the article by Guenin¹ on the morality of embryonic stem cell research.

I read Guenin’s article with great interest, being both a physician and an ordained minister of the Roman Catholic Church. Guenin’s argument from nonenablement appears to flow primarily from one simple premise, that the biologic mother of an embryo has the authority to decide that embryo’s fate and can therefore offer it for research or for intrauterine development, at her own choice. This is a premise that permits yet another interpretation.

The other position is that there is no human being who has such authority, because such authority rests only in God. This is a position that certainly seems irrational to us limited-view human beings, who can see only the physical world around us. However, I believe it is the ultimate truth on which all the other arguments must be based. Given this premise, no argument would seem “acceptable” to allow embryonic research. In any case, this is the position from which the arguments must start. As stated previously, this is my personal bias, although it certainly dovetails with that of many others in our society, not just those in my own church community.

Undoubtedly, Guenin will claim some ability to read the mind of God in this regard, since he did so twice in his commentary. However, having admitted my own bias in this regard, I invite Guenin to admit his.

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1. Guenin LM. The morality of unenabled embryo use—arguments that work and arguments that don’t. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2004;79:801-808.

To the Editor: Does a human life begin at birth, during the formation of the neural tube, when the heart starts beating, or when a human form is recognizable? Logically, human life begins at conception, which means at the moment of the union of an egg and a sperm. Nonenablement, as discussed by Guenin,¹ is an interesting concept but inadequate to justify mass cannibalism of human embryos. Just because non-enabled embryos will otherwise perish, it does not follow that we have a right to manipulate and cannibalize their life.

The concept of a person being a union of a soul and a body implies that the 2 are joined at the moment of conception and grow together. An embryonic spirit/soul is still a spirit and soul. Once we deem an embryo unenabled, is it then nonhuman? Guenin strips all human personhood from unenabled embryos but quickly wants to cannibalize their tissue for replacement human organs. The basic intellectual contradiction is as glaring as the gaping portal onto the path descending into the moral abyss that is paved by the good intentions of scavenging embryonic and fetal stem cells.

Aborted fetuses are “unenabled.” Why not use aborted tissue for research as well? It could help ameliorate the feelings of guilt if a woman knew her dismembered or brain-evacuated child could provide tissue and organs for other people. Why don’t we just breed unenabled anencephalic (no brain) babies, grow them in tanks, and then harvest their organs? How about killing severely retarded people (who may