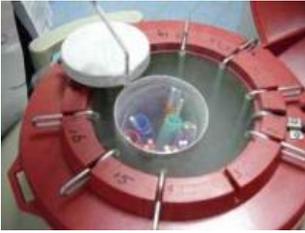


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## How Worldviews Work — An Urgent Illustration

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Worldviews work at multiple levels in each individual. Every person operates out of a basic set of convictions about reality, truth, meaning, and how the world works. Disagreements between individuals and groups on controversial issues can almost always be traced back to a fundamental difference in worldview, recognized or not.

Very often, a difference in worldview becomes apparent when a decision of fundamental importance has to be made. When severe and significant disagreement becomes obvious, parties to the disagreement often find themselves genuinely surprised that anyone could hold the position they now confront.

Consider this truth in the case of a married couple deciding what to do with frozen embryos they do not intend to have implanted in the wife's womb. Should they be offered for adoption, stored indefinitely at great cost, donated for medical research, or destroyed?

The January 30, 2006 edition of *USA Today* takes us right into such a situation. Just consider how the story is introduced:

*Ingrid Jansson peers through a vapor of liquid nitrogen at frozen embryos conceived for her in a petri dish four years ago. It's the first time she's eyed the surplus from the in vitro fertilization procedure that brought her son Dylan, now 3, into the world.*

*"It's surreal," says Jansson, 39, as an embryologist fishes out the thin straw containing eight embryos stored at a fertility clinic where she was treated and now works as a nurse. "I don't think about them much, because I have two (children) at home that keep me busy."*

Then:

*Jansson, who is not religious, wants to donate her embryos for research. She says giving them to an infertile couple is "not an option" because it "would be like giving away my own child, my own DNA." Gardner is Catholic, and he objects. He says stem cell research, which dismantles embryos, is "destroying human life" and opposes it for his "son's siblings." Says Jansson, "It's very difficult for us to decide."*

This disagreement could hardly be more basic. The wife would destroy the embryos rather than allow someone else to raise "my own child, my own DNA," while her husband opposes the destruction of human embryos and refers to their own embryos as their "son's siblings." Which is it? Insignificant biomatter or siblings? How's that for a difficult marital moment?

The paper also features yet another couple in disagreement:

*Alexandra Chisholm-Chait, calls herself "a person of faith" but says government should not be "instituting religious morality on research." After \$250,000 in fertility treatment, including 14 rounds of IVF and a daughter born through a surrogate mother, she is weighing what to do with four embryos.*

*Chisholm-Chait, 44, is leaning toward giving them to another infertile couple. About 150 babies have been born that way since 1998, Levin estimates. Chisholm-Chait's husband, Nicholas Abboud, wants to donate them for stem cell research so more people could benefit. One thing they agree on is that they must come to an agreement. "What good is it serving anybody in a state of frozen perpetuity?" she asks. "They're not going away, so you have to decide what to do with them."*

Let's hope that this mother does not allow the destruction of these embryos, but what does she mean when she argues that the government should not employ "religious morality on research?" What morality would she prefer? Or, is she implying that only a religious morality (specifically a Christian morality) would care about the disposition of these embryos?

Hundreds of thousands of frozen human embryos lie in a frozen state in American IVF clinics. Thus, thousands of couples now face the question that divides these two couples. Human dignity hangs in the balance.

The practice of creating multiple human embryos for IVF treatments — embryos in excess of those implanted in the womb — is itself an immoral practice. This is but one of the most significant moral complications inherent in the IVF technology.



But the worldview dimension of this debate is particularly instructive. In both cases, these couples are divided by their deepest beliefs — beliefs about what it means to be human and what responsibility we bear to protect human dignity. They reach their conclusions through the filters of their own worldview. These differences are so deep that one spouse refers to the embryos as his son's "siblings" while the other speaks of "my own DNA" as the only significant issue.

The Christian responsibility is to develop an authentically Christian worldview, based in God's self-revelation and in thoughtful conversation with other faithful Christians.

Beyond this, the disagreements between the spouses in these two marriages should serve as a reminder and illustration of why Christians are commanded to marry other Christians, rather than those who do not know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Just imagine this level of disagreement over a question of this urgency. Worldviews matter.

