



Human Stockpiling

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A recent news report chronicled a Chinese woman named Huang Yijun. Sixty years ago, her unborn child died, but the pregnancy was never expelled from her body. Instead, her baby's body slowly began to calcify inside her, becoming a crystallized, stone-like mass. Such stone babies (known as "lithopedions") are extremely rare. When Mrs. Huang was 92 years old, the baby was discovered in her abdomen and surgically removed.

This rare medical event prompts us to consider a thought experiment. Imagine a drug that could be injected into a child to crystallize him, but without killing him. The process would turn the child into a static mass for as many years as the parents wanted; another injection would reverse the process, and allow the child to wake up and continue growing. Parents who decided they needed a break from parenting could bring their kids to the clinic and pay to store them as crystals for a limited period of time. Some children might end up never being decrystallized, with their stony bodies piling up in warehouses.

Such a bizarre warehousing of children is not as outlandish as it might seem. In fact, fertility clinics in the United States already warehouse more than 500,000 children

in high-tech freezers filled with liquid nitrogen, children who are crystallized by-products of the *in vitro* fertilization process. Parents can choose to "re-animate" their embryonic children by thawing them, implanting them, and gestating them, but in other instances, they end up being abandoned because their parents are now too old to carry a pregnancy, or are content with the number of their already-born children.

The multi-billion dollar business of infertility in the U.S. has been aptly described as a kind of "Wild West," a lawless frontier where nearly anything goes, including the daily freezing and stockpiling of scores of humans who are still in their embryonic stages. This practice stands out as one of the great humanitarian tragedies of our age.

Few commentators, however, dare to raise their voice against this injustice, which is proficiently marketed as a matter of personal reproductive choice and freedom. Because our frozen children have no voice to speak in their own defense, we slip into a mindset that ignores their inherent dignity.

But not every country has been so blind. Germany, which has a strong historical memory of

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the consequences of ignoring human dignity, declines to participate in these charades. Strikingly, human embryos are not being frozen anywhere in the country, and virtually none are held in cryogenic storage. Meanwhile, countless American parents find themselves caught in agonizing dilemmas about what to do with their offspring held in suspended animation.

The reason for this remarkable difference lies in the fact that the Germans enacted an Embryo Protection Law in the 1990's that included provisions outlawing the freezing of human embryos. Italy passed similar legislation. Both countries closely regulate *in vitro* fertilization treatments, and allow the production of no more than 3 embryos at a time, all of whom must be implanted into their mother. Both countries forbid the production of extra embryos, experimentation on embryos, cloning of embryos, and genetic testing of embryos.

Not much reflection is needed to realize the serious injustice involved in forcefully "crystallizing" another human being. The freezing and thawing process itself subjects embryonic humans to significant risk, and up to fifty percent of embryos do not

survive the process. Stored embryos often end up being condemned to a kind of perpetual stasis, locked in time in the harsh wasteland of their liquid-nitrogen orphanages. This injustice, once it has been foisted upon human embryos, is then used by others to argue on behalf of an even more egregious offense against their dignity: the destructive strip-mining of embryos to acquire their stem cells.

The radical stockpiling of embryonic humans threatens to become nearly routine in our society, as such humans are reduced to little more than "stony objects" to be warehoused and manipulated — valuable primarily for how they can serve the commercial interests or the personal desires of others. The temptation to dehumanize our own brothers and sisters is a perennial one, hearkening back to that time in our country, not so long ago, when slaves could be considered only three-fifths of a person for purposes of congressional representation. Treating embryos as zero-fifths of a person constitutes an even more deplorable violation of human rights.

The United States urgently needs embryo protection laws. Men and women of conscience must pres-

sure lawmakers to act. The putative and widely-touted "self-regulation" of fertility clinics remains a dismal failure. Laws like those in Germany and Italy, while they would not stop every injustice done to the least powerful among us, could go a long way towards assuring that further forms of scientific barbarism and human exploitation do not become commonplace.

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