

## DOES A FETUS FEEL PAIN?

The fetal pain question is not at all central to the abortion debate. Whether the unborn child suffers pain during an abortion or not is secondary to the much bigger reality; the child is being killed. Quietly shooting someone in their sleep makes you no less guilty of murder than if you had stabbed them to death. Providing an unborn child with anesthesia so you can kill them “humanely” makes abortion no less heinous.

The real significance of the fetal pain question is in its implications about the unborn. People feel pain. Inanimate clumps of cells do not. This is what is at stake. This is why most abortion supporters work so hard to oppose legislation like *The Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act*, introduced on January 26, 2005. This is why they call all such enactments “inflammatory anti-abortion propaganda”. What would *The Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act* require? It requires that abortion providers notify any woman seeking an abortion more than 20 weeks after fertilization that there is growing medical evidence that the preborn child in her womb can feel “severe and extreme pain” during an abortion. If she decides to go through with the abortion, she would be offered anesthesia for the baby in order to lessen its suffering.

The fact that fetuses can feel pain is really quite obvious. Since newborn babies can feel pain, fetuses can feel pain. There is no pain switch which suddenly switches to “on” during the journey through the birth canal. The only question is *when* do fetuses feel pain? The *Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act* places a fetus’ ability to feel pain at 20 weeks from fertilization, about half way through pregnancy. Twenty weeks is a conservative enough estimate that even some prominent abortion supporters have conceded its reliability.

In the end, the question of fetal pain, like almost all abortion controversy comes down to who you believe. Pro-life doctors state that fetuses can feel pain by 8 weeks after fertilization (about the time most surgical abortions take place). Pro-abortion doctors argue that fetuses don’t experience pain until the very end of pregnancy. Whose testimony is more reliable, those who have a financial interest in the availability of abortion or those who don’t? Ethically speaking, who is going to be less likely to lie, those who believe dismembering living human beings is a legitimate medical practice or those who don’t?

Sir Albert Lilley, widely considered the “Father of Fetology”, and unabashedly pro-life (as anyone with his vast knowledge of fetal development should be) makes some remarkable statements about fetal pain in an interview he conducted for the book *The Tiniest Humans*.

**Question:** In the case of an 8- to-10-week fetus, if you apply pressure will it tend to try to get out of the way?

**Answer:** Normally it would be extremely difficult, apart from putting a foreign instrument or needle into the uterus to apply pressure, but with a fetus at that maturity you have a very small fetus in a larger capsule of fluid. However, as the famous work of Dr. Davenport Hooker shows, in his many thousands of feet of film, babies at this maturity are responsive to touch.

The fetus also responds violently to painful stimuli-needle puncture and injection of cold or of hypertonic solutions- stimuli which you and I find painful, children will tell you are painful, and the neonate, to judge from his responses, finds painful.

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I have been told by advocates of abortion that we have no proof that the fetus actually feels pain. Strictly, they are quite correct. Pain is a peculiarly personal and subjective experience and there is no biochemical or physiological test we can do to tell that anyone is in pain - a phenomenon which makes it very easy to bear other people's pain stoically, which is an important point for obstetricians to remember. By the same token we lack any proof that animals feel pain. However, to judge from their responses, it seems charitable to assume they do. Were this not so there would be no point in having an organization like the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and I for one would be unhappy to think we would withhold from the human fetus a charitable consideration we were prepared to extend to animals.

**Question:** The question, then, of pain felt by the fetus - it is your personal opinion, I gather from what you say in your paper, that in effect the fetus does feel pain?

**Answer:** I can only say that the fetus responds violently to stimuli that you and I would find painful. Bertrand Russell once remarked that a fisherman had told him that fish had neither sense or sensation, but how he knew that the fisherman would not tell him.