

## The Killing of "Non-Person"

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I am a residency physician in a county hospital where I give medical care to the indigent.

Recently I cared for a baby who somehow survived an abortion attempt. Although strong enough to live awhile outside the womb, he was too young to continue to live after being separated from his mother. His lungs were not developed adequately to support his respiratory needs. There was nothing medical science could do to save him. Death was inevitable, but I was to care for him until that time.

I have been a physician for three years. On several occasions I have seen aborted babies with a heartbeat. But this baby was not limp like the others. He was moving his arms and legs and looked as if he wanted to cry. It was embarrassing for the abortionist.

The situation seemed absurd. Here was a tiny human being who just minutes before had been legally a nonperson. After surviving the abortion attempt, however, he was considered a person and was entitled to his right for adequate care.

Paradoxically, the same medical system that had failed to kill him was now attempting to save his life. He was transferred to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) when it became obvious he was too tough to die quickly.

I stared down at his fragile body lying under a heating lamp for warmth. Emotion rose in my chest with each heartbeat. I had the impression that the entire universe was focused on that one human being. I wrote routine orders for babies admitted to the NICU, but this admission clearly was not routine.

His breathing was labored. He grimaced. He struggled against something he had no ability to comprehend. I could see him, but he could not see me. His eyes were fused shut. He would never know me. He would never remember me. But I would remember him.

Finally, his grunting quieted, movements ceased, and the grimace passed. He was no longer breathing, but his heartbeat continued. (It isn't unusual for babies' hearts to keep beating for some time after they are in all other ways dead.) By now there was irreversible brain damage due to lack of oxygen.

Fifteen minutes passed. There was no breathing, yet the pattern on the heart monitor did not change. In spite of the heartbeat I refused to prolong the ordeal. I removed his monitor leads and pronounced him dead.

I wonder why babies like him can be killed, while others of us have our lives and rights protected. I've posed that question to those in my profession who perform abortions. I have been surprised by the number who justify it based on economics.

A typical response is: "It's cheaper in the long run for taxpayers to pay for abortions rather than letting unwanted babies be born and become a burden to society." (The majority of patients at my hospital are poor, and their medical care is provided through tax money.)

When it comes to human lives, I am convinced we need a higher standard than economics. We need to hold our laws to the highest standard rather than conform the laws to justify our actions. Freedom of choice is a fundamental concept in our system of government, but let's not deny this freedom to those incapable of

defending their own rights: the unborn.

Our government allows for nonviolent change in law. When we the people judge a law to be immoral, we can change it through elections. The time is ripe for laws against abortion. Reasonable people will no longer sit by while unborn babies are categorized as non-persons and killed by the millions.

Whether abortion is wrong is no longer the question. The question is whether we will bring about change. Will our children some day hang their heads in shame because of what we allowed to be done to their brothers and sisters? God help us.