

Madison Lewis

Dr. Eric Moore

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### Moral Requirement of Ovarian Tissue Cryopreservation in Children

Ovarian Tissue Cryopreservation (hereafter OTC) is a preventative procedure whereby a doctor removes part of an any-aged female's ovary, and with it many unfertilized eggs, and freezes it so that it can be re-implanted into the woman later in life. The purpose of this is to allow women who have had to undergo sterilizing treatments (for cancer, etc.) or who have faced some other sort of infertility challenge to still have a chance of becoming pregnant naturally later in life. Jennifer Ladd and Leo Unger of Stanford's Center for Biomedical Ethics argue for the eventual moral requirement of OTC in children by comparing it to vaccination in children, which they assume for the purposes of their article is morally required (Unger and Ladd 50).

Unger and Ladd compare the ethics behind the preventative procedure of vaccination to the ethics behind the preventative procedure of OTC by claiming that vaccination is morally required because it meets the following four criteria. Vaccination:

- 1) Safeguards a child's best interests, as determined by a guardian.
- 2) Prevents serious medical adverse effects.
- 3) Protects vital and valuable human capabilities.
- 4) Is almost certain to achieve the desired benefits of the intervention (Unger and Ladd 50-51).

They further claim that, since OTC already meets the first three criteria, it is probable that as the experimentation with OTC continues, confidence in the procedure will increase and the fourth

“certain benefit” criterion will be met, thereby making OCT a moral requirement rather than simply morally permissible. In this paper, I will first present the authors’ argument for the moral requirement of OTC as well as rationale for said argument; next, I will expose a weakness in the authors’ argument by offering a counterexample that fits with the authors’ set of criteria but is not considered a moral requirement; finally, I will offer a solution to the problem with the authors’ set of criteria for moral requirements.

Based on the fact that vaccination both meets the four moral requirement criteria and is assumed to be morally required, Unger and Ladd assert that the following argument can be used to determine whether or not a preventative medical procedure is morally required:

- 1) If medical procedure *A* meets all four moral requirement criteria, then the procedure is morally required.
- 2) *A* meets all four moral requirement criteria.
- 3) Therefore, *A* is morally required (Unger and Ladd 50-51).

Since vaccination meets all four criteria for and is generally accepted as a moral requirement, Unger and Ladd compare it to OTC in order to justify their claim that OTC firmly satisfies the first three moral requirement criteria. They claim OTC meets the first criterion by stating that parents who choose to have OTC performed for their female children have the same goal of keeping their children’s best interests in mind as parents who choose to vaccinate their children (Unger and Ladd 51). In support of OTC’s meeting of the second criterion, the authors claim that the consequences of infertility, like psychiatric issues such as depression and anxiety, can be very grave, just as the consequences of foregoing vaccination can be. The authors compare the protection of the “vital and valuable human capability” of sexual reproduction tied to OTC to the

loss of mobility and health tied to (particularly polio) vaccinations in order to justify their claim that OTC meets the third moral requirement criterion (Unger and Ladd 51).

Unger and Ladd point out that OTC does not meet the fourth moral requirement criterion like vaccination does, or at least it does not meet it yet. OTC is still considered an experimental procedure. That being said, there has been considerable success with it so far. To support their claim that OTC has the potential of meeting the fourth and final criterion, the authors use the fact that it is highly probable that OTC will eventually become trusted enough to be considered a procedure with a certainty of benefit associated with it, thereby qualifying it as a morally required procedure (Unger and Ladd 51).

I agree that vaccination and OTC both meet (or have the potential to meet) all four of the authors' moral requirement criteria. I also agree with the authors' assumption that vaccination is morally required. However, there are other preventative medical procedures that children undergo which meet all four moral requirement criteria without being classified as moral requirements. One example is dental sealants. A dental sealant is a "paint" that dentists put onto children's permanent molars that is hardened by UV rays and that seals out damaging particles that could cause cavities. Parents make the choice to have sealants put on their children's teeth with their children's best interest in mind, which means sealants meet the first moral requirement criterion. Sealants prevent cavities, which, untreated, are a "serious medical adverse effect;" this means that sealants meet the second criterion (Unger and Ladd 50). Sealants protect the "valuable human capability" of being able to chew pain-free with all teeth intact, meaning that they meet the third criterion. And finally, sealants have a high success rate, which means that they meet the fourth criterion as well. All this being said, no one calls it "immoral" to opt out of having sealants put on one's children's teeth, nor should they.

Similarly, it would be unreasonable to call parents who opt out of the unnecessary procedure of OTC “immoral.” Based on the sealants counterexample and the issue arising with OTC, it seems as though the Unger and Ladd’s set of four criteria for determining the moral requirement of a preventative medical procedure is lacking and in need of an additional criterion. The question becomes: What is it about vaccination that is different from OTC and dental sealants? The most obvious answer is that ensuring that children are vaccinated can save their lives. Further, ensuring that children are vaccinated can save the lives of many people around the children as well, which makes this live vs. death characteristic even more compelling. However, opting for OTC or dental sealants carries a much lighter weight. It would be unreasonable to claim that procedures like OTC or sealants save the lives of the children who opt in for the procedures and even more unreasonable to say that they save the lives of others. If a fifth criterion such as “can make a difference between life and death” is added to Unger and Ladd’s original set of four, vaccinations still meet all of the criteria and are still considered morally required (which is generally accepted as true) whereas OTC and dental sealants no longer meet all the requirements and are not considered morally required (which, it can reasonably be assumed, would also be generally accepted as true).

Unger and Ladd’s case for the moral requirement of OTC is unreasonable. They fail to consider other preventative medical procedures, like dental sealants, that meet all four of their moral requirement criteria but are not generally accepted as moral requirements. Also, their set of moral requirement criteria is incomplete and would need an addition, such as “can make a difference between life and death” in order for it to work as a legitimate set of criteria. Doing so would maintain the veracity of the moral requirement of vaccines while also backing up the fact that neither dental sealants nor OTC are generally accepted as morally required.

Work Cited

Ungar, Leo D J, and Jennifer M Ladd. "The Ethical Status Of Prophylactic Interventions In Children: Ovarian Tissue Cryopreservation And Vaccination." *American Journal Of Bioethics* 12.6 (2012): 50-52. *Philosopher's Index*. Web. 28 Nov. 2016