

Matters of life.

What you need to know:

- Beliefs about when life begins.
- Who is responsible for life?
- Implications of development in medicine.
- Implications of medical research.
- Artificial methods of causing pregnancy.
- The concept of the sanctity of life.

When does life begin?

When you consider this question your own ideas will influence your opinion in dealing with this matter so be careful to give a balanced view!

Some people believe that life begins when we are born as we are then classed as a physical being. We have also existed in the womb and before and that we will continue to exist after we die. This is linked to the idea of **reincarnation**. That we have lived many lives and will continue to do so after we have left this body we are in now.

Some people argue that life starts at the moment of conception (when the sperm fertilises the egg). At this moment there is a distinct life that is separate from its parents and has its own unique genetic code. Other suggestions include:

- When the embryo is implanted into the womb.
- When the primitive streak (the first signs of the back bone) appears at about 14 days.
- When the baby moves for the first time.
- At the first heartbeat.
- When the foetus could survive outside the womb.
- When the baby is born.

Who do you think is responsible for life? All of the world's religions (apart from Buddhism) teach that the answer lies with God.

| Religion: | Teaching: |
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| Christianity. | Christians believe that God is the creator of all life on this |

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| | <p>earth. And that we as humans have a special relationship with Him as we were created in his image (Genesis 1:26). Roman Catholics believe that we are human from the moment of conception while other Churches believe that it is when the foetus becomes baby shaped.</p> |
| Islam. | <p>Muslims believe that Allah creates all humans and provides children as a special gift. Life begins at inception (when the sperm and the egg are fused together). The soul of a new person is received at the 120th day of the pregnancy.</p> |
| Judaism. | <p>Jews believe that each person is unique and is a gift from God. He knows us before we are born (Psalm 139: 13, 15) and gives our life a purpose. For Jews life does not begin until the baby is half way down the birth canal.</p> |

Fertility treatments:

Couples that are infertile may use treatments and they include:

- AIH. Artificial insemination by using the husband's sperm. Doctors collect the sperm and then place them into the neck of the womb.
- AID. This is the same as the above but the sperm is donated from a different male.
- IVF. *In Vitro* fertilisation: the sperm and the egg are fertilised out of the body and placed into the womb in a hope that pregnancy will occur.
27% of all IVF births produce 2 or more babies.
1 in every 80 births today is performed this way.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act of 1990:

This Act includes provisions to regulate research using human embryos. It includes:

- Research into human embryos.
- The storage of eggs, sperm and embryos.

- Fertility treatment that uses donated eggs or sperm (AID) or embryos that are created outside the womb (IVF).

Surrogacy:

This is when a woman has a baby for another woman who cannot have her own children. She may become pregnant either by a sperm donation from the father or from another man.

However it is important to remember that:

- To advertise surrogacy is against the law.
- It is also illegal for the doctors to receive money for this type of treatment.
- The surrogate mother does not have to give up her baby once it is born.
- The child has to be related (genetically) to at least one of the commissioning parents.
- No money other than expenses must be paid in respect of the surrogacy arrangements.

Six weeks after the birth, the intended parents can apply for a parental order for full and permanent rights over the child.

However there are religious opinions on this issue that have to be remembered. Below you will see three of these opinions - remember, for the exam you will only need to know two of these. There are three below to give you a choice.

| Religion: | Teaching: |
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| Roman Catholic Church. | Roman Catholics do not support the idea of fertility treatments and surrogacy. They believe that if the couple cannot have a child through the proper means then God did not want the couple to have children. |
| Islam. | If a couple cannot have children through the natural process then medical help is allowed. However AID is not allowed as it is classed as committing adultery as the donor is not known. Surrogacy is not an option as within this religion men can have up to 4 wives to ensure that the family name is passed on. |

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| Judaism. | For non -orthodox (non strict) Jews all forms of fertilisation is allowed as a human being is produced. Yet AID is not allowed as it may well lead to people marrying who are related but without knowing this. Surrogacy is nor acceptable to Jews as the idea of motherhood is very important to the religion as it is passed onto the children from the mother. |
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Transplant surgery:

This is the name given to the procedure of replacing an organ from one person and placing it into another. Often the replacement is from someone who has died. These types of operations save or improve the quality of life of thousands of people each year. Transplants include all the major organs like the heart, lungs and kidneys. The person who is donating and the recipient have to be a match or the transplant will fail and the person's organ that has been donated will be useless. Recent advances in medicine have produced a system called **xenotransplantation**. This is where an organ from a genetically modified animal can be placed into a human.

All of the world's religions accept the idea of transplantation if organs as long as the person concerned has given their consent. However Jews are the only group who do not allow transplants if the organ has come from an animal.

Human genetic engineering:

Scientist will soon be able to produce 'designer babies'. This means that people will be able to soon decide a manner of things about their child, even down the sex, colour of the hair and eyes. This procedure is called genetic engineering. Genes are made up of **DNA** (deoxyribonucleic acid). The collective name of all of these genes is the **human genome**. The genome is like a recipe book for each person. Scientists have been able to map the human genome to be able to see if there will be any genetic disorders. Faulty genes cause disease as they give out a fault message to the cell. **Gene therapy** involves replacing one gene with another non-defective gene.

Cloning:

Cloning is the production of a genetically identical (sharing the same nuclear gene set) individuals. Dr. Ian Wilmut claimed that his first 276 attempts to clone a sheep resulted in malformed animals. Dolly the sheep was his 277th attempt and was successful.

There are two main ways to clone. They are:

1. Embryo cloning requires the removal of 1 cell from an embryo and encouraging the cell to develop into a separate embryo. It has the same DNA as the original - this is the procedure used for Dolly the sheep.
2. Therapeutic cloning involves taking DNA out of an embryo and replacing it with DNA from another individual. The process kills the embryo but the stem cells may be grown into a replacement heart, liver and so on. This process is still being developed. If it continues to be successful it may overcome the problem of donor matches, as the organs DNA would match that of the patient.

Cloning humans:

This is not legal but some people from all over the world have claimed to have done this. Arguments in favour include:

- It will allow selective breeding to improve the human race.
- Parents could choose the sex of their offspring.
- It is just an extension of IVF.
- It is no more playing God than other fertility treatments.

Arguments against this type of treatment include:

- It is playing God.
- It denies the sanctity of life.
- A clone would not be a real human with its own identity, as it will be shared with the person it came from.
- The clone may not have a soul - after all many religions believe that the soul enters the body at the moment of conception.

Below you will see three religious beliefs on this issue:

| Religion: | Teaching: |
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| Christianity. | Most Christians do not oppose the cloning of animals but do draw the line at humans as it threatens the uniqueness of us all as we were given this by God. |

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| | Cloning should not be used for the creation of 'spare parts' for humans. |
| Islam. | Muslims do not believe in human cloning as it undermines the ties of the family. |
| Judaism. | Any form of cloning is not acceptable as it is playing God. |

Remember that you will be expected to show that you are aware of the teachings and beliefs of the two religious teachings you are using. DO NOT give one-sided answers in the evaluation questions. It is better to give both sides to ensure that you do not show bias for your own opinions.