



ETHICAL DIMENSIONS

ISSUE #13

MARCH 1995

Life Support for Brain-Dead Pregnant Woman

This much is beyond medical debate: Marion Ploch is dead. On October 4, while driving to work near the Bavarian city of Erlangen, the 18-year-old dental assistant lost control of her car and crashed. Doctors at the city's University Clinic spent the next four days trying to revive her, but the woman's injuries were too severe. She was declared legally dead on October 8. Weeks afterward, her doctors still have no intention of turning off the machines that sustain her life. Marion Ploch was 14 weeks pregnant when she died. Somehow the crash that killed the expectant mother left the fetus unscathed. Doctors want to give the child a chance to live by sustaining the mother's life until the fetus is developed enough to survive outside the womb. Ploch never married, and the father's identity remains a mystery. At first her parents wanted to lay their daughter to rest as soon as possible, fetus or no fetus, but a prolonged reflection convinced them to support this attempt to save the fetus. Eventually they appeared on national TV and vowed to raise the child as their own (they are in their mid-30s). "We will do everything we can to see that when our baby is born, it gets all the love it can." Doctors have succeeded before in maintaining brain-dead pregnant women until their fetuses became viable.

This case can be considered from the perspectives of individual ethics, institutional ethics and societal ethics. Please answer the following questions in these areas using this scale:

1 strongly agree 2 agree 3 not sure 4 disagree 5 strongly disagree

<i>Individual Ethics</i>	<i>Institutional Ethics</i>	<i>Societal Ethics</i>
<p>1. Ms. Ploch is dead and this is the main issue. Treatment should be stopped.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>	<p>1. It would be ethically justified if the clinic had a policy of not providing life-sustaining treatment in such cases.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>	<p>1. The resources used in this attempt (possibly over \$500,000) will result in care being denied to others with a better chance at survival. So much money for so little chance cannot be ethically justified.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>
<p>2. The fetus can be saved and that is the main issue. Treatment should be continued.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>	<p>2. There should be professional guidelines to guide physicians in making such decisions.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>	<p>2. Society should support such protection of fetal life.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>
<p>3. The wishes of Ms. Ploch, if known, should determine what we do.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>	<p>3. An insurance company should not have to pay for such heroic care.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>	<p>3. Society should resist the consideration of money in such a case.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>
<p>4. To allow the fetus to die would be tragic but not unethical.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>	<p>4. Churches should develop guidelines for their believers to follow in such cases.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>	<p>4. We should spend more resources on long-term health care rather than on such marginally beneficial care.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>
<p>5. Ms. Ploch's parents, as her surrogates, should have the power to decide about her continued treatment.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>	<p>5. Schools should promote consideration of such questions as part of standard education.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>	<p>5. Society should always be able to find the resources to provide care in such tragic cases.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>



**OPINIONS AND FEELINGS ARE FREQUENTLY A PERSONAL TRIUMPH OVER GOOD THINKING
YOU DEFINE REALITY BY WHAT YOU KNOW, WHAT YOU BELIEVE, AND WHAT YOU DO ABOUT IT.**