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Head-Counting vs. Heart-Counting: An Examination of the  
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# **HEAD-COUNTING VS. HEART-COUNTING**

*an examination of the recent case of  
the conjoined twins from Malta*

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**Y. MICHAEL BARILAN**

**ABSTRACT** This paper reexamines the recent case of the conjoined twins from Malta. Survival was said to be possible only through separation, which would actually leave only one twin alive. The parents refused to allow the killing of one to save the other, but the court ruled that this would amount to the neglect of innocent life. The article questions the assumption that the case is indeed a struggle between two people. Further, it questions the assumption that a conjoined twin's natural interest and wish is separation. Historical evidence shows that many conjoined twins do not wish for separation, even when it becomes a question of survival. The article concludes with a critical evaluation of the tendency in contemporary society and particularly in bioethics to regard ethical challenges as rivalry between individuals competing for scarce resources.

## **THE TWO HEADED CALF**

*Tomorrow when the farm boys find this  
freak of nature, they will wrap his body  
in newspaper and carry him to the museum.*

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The epigraph "The Two Headed Calf" is from *Hocus Pocus of the Universe* by Laura Gilpin, copyright © 1977 by Laura Gilpin. Used by permission of Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc.

This paper is dedicated to Miriam and Gene Summ.

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*But tonight he is alive and in the north  
field with his mother. It is a perfect  
summer evening: the moon rising over  
the orchard, the wind in the grass. And  
as he stares into the sky, there are  
twice as many stars as usual.*

—Laura Gilpin (1977)

ONE DAY IN THE SUMMER OF 2000, a couple from Malta arrived in the United Kingdom in order to deliver a pregnancy too complicated to be continued on their native island. The mother was carrying conjoined twins, who were later to be nicknamed Jodie and Mary (their actual names remain confidential). Jodie and Mary were sustained by a single heart and shared other internal organs.<sup>1</sup> They were not expected to survive more than a few months. The doctors suggested removing Mary so as to allow Jodie, the stronger twin, to live. The parents, who had refused abortion on the grounds of Catholic morals, also refused to allow the killing of one child in order to save the other. The doctors could not accept the preventable loss of innocent life and took the matter to court. Lawyers were appointed to represent each twin, and the judge eventually ruled in favor of surgery, which was performed in November. Mary died; Jodie is still alive but in need of special care and a series of reconstructive surgical interventions. The case was extensively covered in world media. Although the condition was extremely rare, it touched on many key issues in bioethics, such as control over biotechnology, state supervision of parenthood, and the drama of a zero-sum predicament in which only one person out of two may survive.

The discussions and litigation followed a familiar pattern. They sought first to ascertain the best interests of each child, and then to figure out whose interests should prevail if the interests of one were irreconcilable with those of the other or with such deontological values as the right to life. The course of the proceedings transformed the extremely unusual case of conjoined newborn twins into a microcosm of the human condition as it is commonly perceived in contemporary culture—namely, a search for individual happiness in ways that do not encroach upon the rights of others, and attempts at sorting out conflicts among differing individual agendas of survival and happiness. Additionally, the language of sacrifice successfully appealed both to Christian religious sentiments of salvation through human sacrifice in the benefit of others and to secular scientific heroism.

<sup>1</sup>The heart was taken to be Jodie's. Dreger (personal communication) argues against the simplistic allocation of organs to persons. For the sake of simplicity, I will follow the ordinary reading of the case and refer to the pre-surgical body in which the heart was placed as "Jodie"; and I will also refer to the surviving child as "Jodie." Nevertheless, throughout this paper I intend to question this terminology and its metaphysics and propose an alternative way of regarding the case and people involved.

This is more-or-less the way the story about the conjoined twins from Malta is told and discussed (see Annas 2001; Bockenheimer-Lucius 2000; Dreger 2000; Guardian 2000; Lancet 2000; Mackenzie 2000; Mallia 2002).<sup>2</sup> Obviously, this narrative presupposes the existence of two individual persons who naturally strive for independent physical existence as well.

I wish to question this very assumption and to ask how many persons the Maltese twins actually were, prior to the surgery, and how the post-surgical Jodie is related to the pre-surgical Jodie. This question may appear superfluous or even ridiculous. People, after all, are separate individuals; their autonomy is both a fact and a highly cherished value. I wish, however, to contend that asking whether to operate on twins, which are—by definition—two people, leads us into circular argumentation, because separation is implicitly taken for granted in the question itself.

#### THE QUESTION OF PERSONHOOD

In her introduction to the discussion of personhood, Amelia Rorty (1976, pp. 1–4) lists three issues that are usually at stake. The first is the very nature of *being human*; the second is *individuation*, a term that refers to the qualities that make two people, such as my identical twin and me, two distinct persons; and the third is *re-identification*, which refers to the qualities that render me the same person over long periods of time, notwithstanding numerous physical and psychological transformations.

#### *Were the Conjoined Twins from Malta Human?*

In classical antiquity, deformed newborns were taken for inhuman monsters. Socrates, for example, does not accept such newborns as real humans. He refers to deformed babies as mere phantoms unworthy of upbringing (Plato, *Theaetetus*, 160e). The English doctors claimed a different position. They fought for separation because they felt obliged to protect human life, no matter how fragile or malformed.

Prejudice about conjoined twins and about the value of such life, although short, may have been the real motivation behind the legal struggle. The doctors may have perceived the twins as phantoms or incomplete humans in need of a humanizing correction. The physicians and the court might have been influenced by the old tendency to either “normalize” or obliterate the deviant and the “monstrous.” The regimes of normalcy are no more merciful than religious

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<sup>2</sup>How reliable was the doctor's prognosis that the twins could not survive in the conjoined state? The case is too rare for evidence-based conclusions. There is at least one documented case of twins who survived against such prediction (Hubbard 1991). It is also noteworthy that almost all attempts at sacrificial separation (e.g., when the removed twin is mature enough to warrant this kind of language) failed to produce long-term survival (Dreger 1998a, pp. 19–20). The justices accepted the opinion of the surgeons, although they did not necessarily constitute an unbiased party. The longest lived separation to date is discussed by Norwitz, et al. (2000).

dogma (see Clark and Myser 1996). Indeed, some authors (such as Dreger 1998a; Grosz 1996; Myser and Clark 1998) have criticized the medicalization of conjoined twins, who are often plucked out of an adapted and meaningful life and subjected to adventurous corrective surgical procedures:

The medicalized staging of the conjoined twins as primarily a technical challenge, a question of surgical procedure, conceals the deeper epistemological and phenomenological insult that the twins embody: namely, the threat that they pose to the corporeal calculus that insists upon one sex, one body and one self. . . . According to this calculus, conjoined twins are not quite human. (Myser and Clark 1998, p. 47)

Dreger (1998a, pp. 22–25) believes that surgeons and other physicians are sometimes primarily motivated by a “technological imperative.” She arrives at a similar conclusion in her study of hermaphroditism in late 19th-century England and France. Hermaphroditism was often taken for a kind of conjoining (Dreger 1998b). Hermaphrodites were also represented as conjoined twins in antiquity (Garland 1995, p. 70). These cultures did not accept the hermaphrodite as a person of its own gender nor as a complete person at all, since unambiguous membership in a dual-gender structure of society, was taken as an essential component of being a human person. Therefore, the hermaphrodite was treated as an outcast that medicine attempted to humanize and socialize by finding out its true sex or by treating it so as to give it a normal sex.

Admittedly, in the case of the Maltese twins, survival in the conjoined state was probably not possible. Whatever opinion or prejudice the doctors and justices held about conjoined twins in general, a genuine struggle to protect human life would call only for separation. By giving the conjoined twins separate names and even lawyers, all of the parties involved indicated concern for the well being of *personal* life, not a vitalistic concerns for human life in general. The discussion of individuation and re-identification, below, will show that separation could not have protected personal life. The notion that a victim of nature and of its parasitic twin would be saved through corrective surgeries and separation is misconceived. Nobody survived the surgery. It merely created a new, disabled, and deformed human being, Jodie.

#### *Were the Conjoined Twins from Malta Individuated?*

The doctors, the justices, and the church regarded the twins as two individuals or souls, simply because the conjoined complex had two heads. The human person, however, is not a Cartesian homunculus. A person is an embodied mind, which is locus of sentience, valuation, and agency (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; McMahan 1999). Whenever sentience, valuation, and agency of one person cannot clearly be distinguished from another’s, individuation has not occurred or has not been completed. Krosgaard (1989) says about the agency of the self: “This does not require that your agency be located in a separately existing entity or

involve a deep metaphysical fact. Instead, it is a practical necessity imposed upon you by the nature of the deliberative standpoint" (p. 111).

This "practical necessity" is applicable to sentience and valuation as well. We can imagine how each brain processes sensorial stimuli independent of the other, but what about a surge of adrenaline following a fright reaction, or sensations of satiety and sleeplessness? Examining the functions of the human agent in our society will illustrate that without physical individuation, the meaning of language changes radically. One example was provided by the conjoined twins Violet and Daisy Hilton, who starred in the film *Chained for Life* (1951), a lurid tale in which one sister is accused of murder, but questions are raised as to the fairness of sending her to jail if her innocent sister must go as well. Violet and Daisy married two different men and themselves acted, to a certain degree, as two human agents. Many states refused to grant them a marriage permit. It is also notable that their marriages failed, one of which was annulled. One may wonder if the conjoined life is actually compatible with the practical necessities and the contemporary ethos and practical requirements of marriage (Bogdan 1988, pp. 166–73). The story goes that their request to travel with a single ticket was denied on the grounds that two mouths would be fed during the journey. According to another story, the Siamese twins Chang and Eng were more successful with the same prank. When a conductor ordered the one not holding a ticket off the train, his brother, whose ticket had already been punched, protested and threatened to sue the train company for forcing him out too.

Chang and Eng decided to resolve the problem of agency by acting like a single person on a time-share basis. One week was spent at Chang's home and Eng submitted to any of his brother's wishes. The next week, Chang followed Eng. According to a different version, the system was based on a three-day period and was initiated by the wives, who wanted more independence from each other. The only practical way those twins found to conduct personal life was either by acting as one Chang-Eng or by hiding away one locus of sentience and agency. Chang was the master of his house because of Eng's submission, and vice versa. Alternate submission was not always carried out. Chang was an alcoholic, whose drinking influenced Eng and possibly killed them both (Robertson 1952).

Regarding individuation, at least from a practical and pragmatic point of view, conjoined twins are only partially individuated from each other. The existence of two brains and two different personalities is not enough.

### *Who Is Jodie?*

Can post-surgical Jodie be re-identified with pre-surgical conjoined complex or the pre-surgical Jodie? I do not think so. No doubt, post-surgical Jodie is the biological continuation of the pre-surgical Jodie in the Jodie-Mary complex. But biological continuation is fundamentally different from personal continuity. We are all the biological continuation of our parents. Identical twins are the biological continuation of one fertilized ovum. Cloned people would be the biologi-

cal continuation of their source of cloning. Indeed, Gould (1997) and McMahan (1999) argue that cloning and monozygote twining are the same biological process. The separation surgery is essentially a completion of arrested monozygote twining. Personal continuity is all that mattered when the doctors wanted to save Jodie or the conjoined complex. It is therefore not clear why the surgery should be regarded as the *saving* of Jodie and not the *creation* of Jodie.

Another analogy would be the condition known as multiple personality disorder (MPD), in which more than one person or personalities inhabit one body.<sup>3</sup> Does the cure of MPD amount to saving one person by means of eliminating others? This would appear ridiculous, although the persons or personalities of MPD patients are more mature than those of the conjoined twins at the time of the operation. Moreover, possibly the cure of MPD should not consist of eliminating the weaker or the least desired personalities, but of establishing healthy harmony amongst them; treating MPD may be an unwanted medicalization imposed by society. A reader of this paper who is a woman with eight personalities commented:

Although I am aware that, from the legal standpoint, I am a single person, I perceive myself as a system of persons. Total integration, as I understand it, would have caused me to perceive myself, and to function, as a single person different from any of my present personalities. It would not have eliminated seven of us to save the eighth; it would have combined all eight of us into someone else—and that is not what any of us wanted. Accordingly, I opted for functional integration as the object of my therapy, so as to preserve the system.

As Krosgaard predicts, practical necessity dictates that an MPD patient is one accountable person. Otherwise, he or she might be exonerated for crimes committed by an alter. The point is that one agent is either found guilty or not guilty. He or she is either punished or not. It is pointless to indict the one personality and acquit another. Conjoined twins who both have mature central nervous systems usually manifest completely different personalities (Smith 1988). Nevertheless, as the case of MPD shows, personality is not a person. The latter is dependent on physical and hence metaphysical and moral individuation.

Constraints on agency are not separate from sentient consciousness. When asked about being tied to a twin during lovemaking, conjoined twins usually answer that they learn how “not to be there” when asked (Mannix 1998, p. 52).

Sensation and control of limbs is divided between paraphagus and dicephalus twins who share only one set of limbs or one set of legs respectively; each, for example, controls one of two legs. This observation is suggestive of dual personhood. On the other hand, absence of control over and sensation from the other

<sup>3</sup>MPD is still the term used in both professional and lay parlance, though the DSM-IV term is “dissociative identity disorder.”

limb compromises the supervenience of the person over the body. Scientists are still puzzled by some conjoined twins' ability to synchronize control over one body. Their neurological condition resembles that of people with split brains. In split-brain patients, the corpus callosum, which connects the two hemispheres of the brain, is severed so they actually have two independent brains. Nagel (1979) closes his discussion of split-brain patients: "The ordinary conception of a single, countable mind cannot be applied to them [patients with split brains] at all, and . . . there is no number of such minds that they possess" (p. 155). Gould (1987, pp. 64–77) arrives at the same conclusion regarding conjoined twins. They are neither one nor two. It is therefore imperative to look for a holistic reconceptualization of the conjoined state of being, one that is embedded in the phenomenology of those people and in the ways they have been accepted by culture and society. Phenomenologists point to the crucial role of every body part in the formation of consciousness and identity. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes: "What it is in us that refuses mutilation and disablement is an I committed to a certain physical and inter-human world, who continues to tend toward his world despite handicap and amputation" (p. 81). Anton LeVay, a side-show persona who knew Violet and Daisy Hilton for many years, said:

I do not believe they could have been cut apart. But beside the physical problem, there was an even stronger psychological difficulty. The sisters had grown so used to sharing sensations, that if they had been separated, they would have been lost. You know that if a man has his leg amputated, he may still be convinced that he feels pain in his toes. If the sisters had been divided, I doubt if they could ever have grown reconciled to losing the other's responses. It would have been like losing part of your brain. (Mannix 1998, p. 53)

The nurses caring for baby twins who were separated wrote: "The healthy whole children . . . are now [after the operation] separate but badly deformed" (Sweeting and Patterson 1984). LeVay speaks about how the sisters might have felt; the nurses spoke as caring outsiders who witness the wounds and cuts and the subjection of the human body to invasive machinery and reengineering.

Medicine, I believe, is about helping people to live with a given body or have a desired body. The surgeons completely distorted the given body, and we found no evidence in support of the belief that their patients wanted the body that the surgeons created.

I wish now to use literary, cultural, and historical sources to examine the understanding and the phenomenology of the conjoined state, and how past conjoined twins saw themselves and the issue of separation.

#### **THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE CONJOINED STATE**

Both Jewish (Genesis Rabbah 8, 5; Theodor and Albeck 1965) and Hellenic (Plato, *Symposium* 189a–190a) traditions depict the first human being as a set of conjoined

male–female twins who were later separated by the Creator.<sup>4</sup> Medieval iconography renders the biblical creation of Eve from Adam's rib as a separation of conjoined twins (Purcell 1997, p. 72). The Talmud (Menahoth, 38a) tells of a person who asked a rabbi on which head a two-headed man should wear the Tefillin (phylactery). The Talmud does not suggest that both heads wear the Tefillin; the existence of a single religious agent or person is implicit in the Talmudic discussion. As opposed to the myth of the dual primordial human, the Talmud insists that the discussion about the two-headed man is not hypothetical, but refers to a real-life case. The Midrash (Eisenstein 1928, p. 534) tells of a two-headed man who claimed a double share of his father's estate. King Solomon poured hot water on one head. Both heads screamed, so the king pronounced the claimant a single person who shares equally with his siblings.<sup>5</sup> Similar stories about "two-headed monsters" were not uncommon in antiquity (Tacitus, *Annales*, XII 64.2; Livy, *History of Rome*, XLI 21.12; *Scriptores Historiae Augusti*, *Antonius Pius*, IX, 3; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Historiae*, XIX 12, 19; for a discussion of more Byzantine and Jewish sources, see Sperber 1999, pp. 13–14). A Jewish Halakhic (Jewish law) anthology from the 16th century ruled that conjoined twins are one human being (Pepper 1967:133).<sup>6</sup>

A story closer to the Maltese Catholic culture is that of the conjoined twins from Hispaniola who died at the age of nine days in the early 16th century. The priest who was summoned for baptism could not decide how many souls inhabited the newborn, and therefore how many sacraments were required. His post-mortem dissection failed to reveal the locus of the soul, and he left the matter undecided (Chavarria and Shipley 1924). Another 16th-century physician opined that thoracophagus twins who share a single heart make one child (Pare 1573, p. 14).<sup>7</sup> The anatomist Realdo Colombo (d. 1559) summoned a multidisciplinary jury to be present in the post mortem dissection of conjoined twins, in one of which no brain liver and heart were found. The jury concluded that the twins made one human individual and possessed one soul (French 1999, pp. 201–2).

Gould and Pyle (1897) present many case reports of conjoinment and congenital deformities and offer different criteria for individuation and personhood. Sometimes they refer to the same case as a two-headed person and sometimes as two people (p. 15). Historical cases of conjoined twins differ from each other. Sometimes senses of hunger and tiredness are separate, sometimes they eat and sleep always at the same time, and so forth (Thompson 1930).

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<sup>4</sup>Since different-sex conjoinment does not occur in nature, I believe that those legends did not develop from real-life observations of conjoined twins.

<sup>5</sup>A 17th-century version of the same test yielded confounding results (Pender 1996, p. 159).

<sup>6</sup>The Hebrew source is B. Ashkenzi, *Shittah Mekubitzeth*, Menachoth 37a (originally 16th century; numerous reprint editions since).

<sup>7</sup>A head with two bodies—or, according to another account, a body with two heads—was born in Florence in 1317. This creature was taken for a single boy. Fifteenth-century conjoined twins were baptized in Paris and given two names (Daston and Park 1998, pp. 57, 65).

History tells us of many cases of parasitic conjoinment, in which one twin is mature while the other is physically and mentally undeveloped. Sometimes the parasite has no head, or has a rudimentary skull buried inside the body of the other twin. Removal of parasites has never been considered immoral, although the mature twin usually gives the parasite a name and treats it as a creature to itself (Fiedler 1978, pp. 219–25). Jewish rabbis also considered only the stronger or bigger twin as a person (Hagiz 1797, §258).

A Jewish physician of early modern Europe (Tobija of Metz 1867, pt. 1, ch. 6) tells a story, which he attributes to Avicenna, about one conjoined twin who objected to her sister's wish to marry on the grounds that her private body parts would be exposed to the husband.<sup>8</sup> In court, the judge asked the appealing twin to stand up and present her case, but she was too weak and could not stand without her sister cooperating. Then the judge asked the twin who was engaged for marriage to stand up and she did, dragging her sister with her. The judge granted a marriage permit because he found the strong twin to be the main person and the weak twin to be a mere subordinate. So the stronger twin married, but the weaker one was embarrassed and painful and finally died, bringing about the death of the “strong” sister as well.

Had Mary survived at all, she would have become a parasite, since her brain was severely atrophied and her body weak. Nevertheless, the litigants ignored the precedent of parasitic twins. Admittedly, the British doctors had historical precedent to rely upon. The first documented attempt at separation was performed in Byzantium in order to save one twin when his brother died (Pentagalos and Lascartos 1984). Virtually all attempts at separation until modernity were in such circumstances. Jodie and Mary's operation might be regarded as an attempt to save Jodie from her dying sister. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, Jodie has never evolved, nor could she develop into a mature person that can be saved as such.

Even when conjoined twins appear clearly as two distinct people, it is still unclear that each wishes for separation. The Biddenden Maids (12th century) were two such twins. They were connected superficially, not sharing internal organs. At times, they even quarreled and hit each other. But when Mary died at the age of 34, Eliza refused separation, being fully aware of the fatal consequences, stating, “as we came together, we will also go together” (Bondeson 1992). Chang and Eng refused separation even when only minor and superficial surgery was required (Fiedler 1978, p. 213; Hunter 1964, p. 86; Raffensperger 1997; Smith 1988).<sup>9</sup> Mary and Margaret Gibb refused separation in 1967, even when

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<sup>8</sup>The book was first published in 16th-century Venice, and I have found this story in one more Jewish source from the same period, but not in Avicenna's writings. I wish to thank Prof. Winowsky from Harvard University and my friend Dr. Ragab from Al-Azhar University for their efforts searching for the original.

<sup>9</sup>Admittedly, fear of excessive risk was also a major consideration in the case of Chang and Eng and in many other cases; for more case reports, consult <<http://zygote.swarthmore.edu/cleave4b.html>>.

one was dying of cancer and was evidently carrying her sister to the grave (New York Times 1967).

Many conjoined twins do not feel and act as two people grafted onto each other, but in peculiar ways that defy unambiguous classification of identities. Chang and Eng married two different women, but they regarded themselves as a single person in many other ways. They signed legal documents and personal correspondence as a single Chang Eng. On the other hand, they used to quarrel and spoke little to each other toward the end of their life (Fiedler 1978, ch. 8). When a man wanted to marry one of the Blazek Twins (late 19th century), they were declared legally one (Thompson 1930, p. 90).

Yvonne and Yvette McCarther (1949–1992) always wore the same clothes, ate the same food simultaneously, and never ingested anything independently (Stumbo 1987). The Los Angeles *Newsday* reporter found their speaking singularly a “disconcerting habit.” What is even more disconcerting, I am afraid, is our habit of simplifying the situation of conjoined twins by regarding them merely as two people chained to each other, forcibly being set up for a life of ridicule and deformity (Hoyle 1990, p. 559). Mark Twain (1894), who was inspired by the Tucci brothers’ visit to Philadelphia College of Physicians and by the Siamese twins Chang and Eng, explored the situation of conjoined twins at length.

What can we learn from the above anecdotes and from Twain’s literary explorations? First, conjoined twins developed meaningful and adaptive notions of self, identity, and embodiment, although these notions are not always consistent from an outsider’s point of view regarding human individuality.

Second, conjoined twins do not suffer from identity problems such as those manifested by psychiatric patients. Rarely do conjoined twins need psychiatric care or become psychologically or socially handicapped.<sup>10</sup> There is no correlation between identity-related disorders or other serious psychiatric pathologies and the appearance or shape of one’s body.

## CONCLUSION

Both modern canon law and common law determine human individuation by the head. Possibly they had better count hearts. Head-counting is close to a Cartesian view of the soul as a distinct entity that is anchored in the head but not directly engaged with the human body. The Cartesian body is related to its mind as chattel to owner, thus promoting the economic language of division and distribution of lives and limbs (Barker 1985; Clark and Myser 1998, p. 353). Heart-counting is

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<sup>10</sup>I am not referring to psychological support. The Russian twins Masha and Dasha needed psychiatric hospitalization (Life 1966). It is unclear, however, to what degree their condition was due to an organic cause or even to the peculiarities of the Soviet system.

less metaphysically ambitious or economically domineering and is more attuned to the practical constraints of embodied life, particularly of social beings.

The popular, legal, and professional media described the ethical challenge of the conjoined twins from Malta as a rivalry between siblings competing for a scarce resource (a single heart) for the sake of survival. I have argued that this rendering influences deliberation and must be questioned and challenged. I am afraid that the old-time tug-of-war for power between church and state has been projected onto the innocent conjoined twins from Malta. The biblical stories about Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau seem to have been grafted onto the Darwinian ethos about the survival of the fittest. This conceptual chimera has been fertilized by contemporary anxieties over scarce resources in health care. The whole affair smacks of irony. Nonreligious parents would most likely have aborted the conjoined fetuses. The Maltese family came to the United Kingdom to benefit from a special philanthropic plan that provides small communities like Malta with medical aid. Had they been born in Malta, Jodie-and-Mary would have been left to die from heart failure; the U.K. legal and medical establishment, on the other hand, mandated separation. Jodie-and-Mary was conceived in counter-reformation Malta and born in enlightened, Protestant England. This is a peculiar and somewhat tragic conjoining in itself. Although Jodie is now recovering and is likely to develop into a mature and possibly happy woman, this does not mean that the coerced separation was the right thing to do. A happy man conceived through rape does not render the rape morally acceptable. A simple comparison to rape is exasperating, of course—yet this hyperbole may shed light on the possibly faulty conceptualization of the Siamese twins from Malta and similar cases of conjoining.

In old times the birth of conjoined twins was interpreted as an omen, an admonishment from God (Daston and Park 1981). What might be the message in the case of the conjoined twins from Malta? Too often we tend to oversimplify bioethical problems and see them as a zero-sum game between rival individuals. Conjoining challenges our sense of selfhood and identity. Rising to this challenge may refresh many commonplace notions about individuality, identity, and being with other people as a fundamental manifestation of being alive as human beings.

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