

Science and Ethics

A Joint Perspective

Spring 2006

Volume 1

Stern College for
Women

Yeshiva University



SCIENCE
AND ETHICS
A JOINT
PERSPECTIVE

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Acknowledgment

We gratefully acknowledge support for this publication from the Ivan Tillem Fund and hope that it serves as a fitting memorial to Mr. Tillem (A'H), who supported the creative talents of the women of Stern College.

The Ethics of Conjoined Twins

Judy Alkoby

Sometimes life presents interesting challenges, which question our ethical beliefs. Often, the answers are not easy and are dependent on various factors. In the case of conjoined twins, is it ethical to terminate the life of one twin in order to save the life of the other? Should nature be allowed to run its course? Should the advance of science and technological studies be used to save conjoined twins? Religious leaders and doctors have struggled with these questions and continue to search for answers.

One of the fundamental rules of Jewish law is that it is prohibited to sacrifice one life for another. Among the exceptions to this rule is the termination of a fetus in order to save the life of its mother. Another exception is the killing of a pursuer who is threatening to take the life of a victim. At first glance, this law would seem to imply that one is not allowed to terminate the life of a conjoined twin in order to spare the life of the other. However, the aforementioned exceptions to this rule will play a critical role in the case of conjoined twins. After a thorough examination of these two exceptions, it becomes evident that there are instances in which the life of one twin can be terminated in order to save the life of the other.