

Conjoined Twin Separation

Modern medical technology allows for the separation of conjoined twins, allowing them to live independently of each other if they survive the complicated procedure. But the operation is not a simple one because twins' vital organs and blood are often shared. In 2000, two girls, conjoined twins under the aliases of "Jodie" and "Mary,"¹³ were considered for such an operation.

Soon after birth, Jodie was found to be anatomically sound, while Mary had a severely underdeveloped brain, no lungs of her own and other severe abnormalities. Furthermore, the girls shared a primary blood vessel and the same blood supply. The over-circulation of the common blood supply would eventually kill both girls if they were not separated.

The girls' parents travelled from their native Malta to the United Kingdom to seek medical advice.

Doctors determined that Jodie was developed enough to survive on her own if the twins were separated but that Mary would surely die. The girls' parents, devout Catholics, opposed separating the children because of the Catholic prohibition against taking any action that would intentionally end a human life.

Despite the parents' wishes, the British High Court ruled that the duty to preserve life was so important that the state could order a separation against the parents' wishes and in the best interest of Jodie, the child who would most likely survive. The parents appealed this decision, and the final ruling in the matter was delivered by the Court of Appeals, whose judges provided several different individual opinions on the case, deciding in favor of ordering the separation.

One judge argued that Mary's death was inevitable and that for Jodie, separation meant the difference between living and dying. Another found that separating the girls was necessary to protect Jodie from the connection to her sister and that Mary was in effect killing Jodie by exhausting her sister's blood supply. Separation was then allowed under a provision of English law that allows for killing in self-defense. After the ruling, the girls were separated and as predicted, Mary soon died. Jodie was eventually taken home by her parents where it seems she will eventually live a relatively normal life.

13 <http://www.hss.cmu.edu/philosophy/london/Twins.pdf>

