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March 6, 2014

WHAT IF...? A COUNTERFACTUAL THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

gene washington, *Utah State University*



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In "The Air We Breathe," broadcast on KUED (February 5, 7, 9) the effects of smog in the valleys of Northern Utah were made clear. The constituents of the smog are sickening and in some cases (fated to increase in number as the population increases) killing us. Not sudden death, but death in slow-motion over a period of time. One point made by a scientist, one not emphasized enough, was what might be called death by genetic transmission to future generations. Toxic particles, breathed into today, damage cells which surface later as damaged cells in persons now unborn.

What I suggest is that we do on this subject what philosophers call a counterfactual thought experiment. Or a What if...? scenario. What if all the unborn later die from the effects of smog? What would change? With no one around what would happen to the values we have today? What would happen to our traditions? Obviously, they would vanish. Please note that in this scenario we assume that we value the unborn more than we do ourselves. They, not us, are what count.

For more on this kind of thought experiment please see Samuel Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*. In the book (reviews are widely available on the web) "afterlife" does not refer to our own personal afterlife, but the unborn *as* our afterlife.