

# Man's Disposition To Play God

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The debate between science and spirituality has continued long before the time of Mary Shelley and is common to this day as humans attempt to reveal the mysteries of this world, often pushing the boundaries of morality. When a man is equipped with the tools to manipulate life, it raises certain dilemmas, much like those raised in Shelley's book *Frankenstein*. The inception of a doomed creature in Shelley's book highlights the outcomes of bringing an unwanted individual into this world and relates closely to the moral implications associated with selective abortions. Man's disposition to play God by attempting to choose who is worthy or unworthy of life has profound negative consequences, as portrayed in Shelley's novel.

Man today has a deep hunger for scientific developments, and Shelley portrays it aptly through Victor Frankenstein's character as he reflects on his creation, "I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (Shelley 59). This rejection of Frankenstein's creature is evident in the current culture. He abandons it after realizing its faults. Philip Ball highlights in his essay that the consequences do not arise from the creation but from his decision of what he did with it later. This story depicts man's transgressions against nature and his tendency to create the unthinkable; it is also a reflection of man's diminishing morality. For long, humankind has lived in a society that is socially prejudiced and lacks empathy for what it deems as "unnatural" (Ball). From the invention of the atomic bomb to the disputed issues of selective abortion or cloning, *Frankenstein* is relevant in today's day and age in the political strife, childbirth woes, autonomy of sexual expression, and bigotry.

The mythical monster created by Mary Shelley presents numerous ethical issues. Many believe that science interferes excessively in matters that should best be left to God. These include the issues related to life and death, which are dealt with by medical professionals committed to preserving life. In this context, while science provides a way to achieve goals, spirituality questions the wisdom of one's decisions. The concept of life and death presented in *Frankenstein* is important because, since Shelley's time, there has been a debate about how one defines life. While some believe that a functioning body is alive, others consider life as the presence of a soul bestowed by God (McCouat). Additionally, Timothy Morton asserts that to understand a life form, we should also think about the monstrous since "monstrous is the minimal unit of evolution" (11). This idea is supported by Darwin, who proclaims that abnormalities caused by evolution result either in a variation or speciation. Based on this argument, Frankenstein's creature should be regarded as a life form.

It is quite common that any life form that deviates from our predetermined notion of what it means to be human is labelled as monstrous or abnormal. However, our reaction towards its existence mustn't necessarily be that of horror (Morton). This disgust towards his creation is evident right from its

inception as Frankenstein exclaims, “Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch” (Shelley 60). His hatred towards the creature continues, as evidenced in the latter part of the novel, “When I thought of him I gnashed my teeth, my eyes became inflamed, and I ardently wished to extinguish that life which I had so thoughtlessly bestowed” (Shelley 103). The problem faced by Frankenstein is much like that faced by numerous potential parents who opt for selective abortion. However, the ethical question prompts one to think about whether one has the right to choose who must and must not live or if such matters are left to God’s will. Should variation from our definition of “normal” be punishable by death?

Shelley’s novel prompts one to think about the fine line between life and death. While materialists attempt to define life in terms of the arrangement of matter itself, vitalism considers it an “animating spark” that is separate from matter. For Frankenstein, when a bolt of lightning gives life to the creature, his dream is realized. However, this idea reduces the existence of mankind to a very basic level: “that life is merely animated meat” (Morton). It does not take into consideration the reality of living a life. It neglects emotions such as empathy, kindness, love, and care as the essence of life itself. Phrases such as the living dead or to feel dead inside often make us question the true spirit of living. With hatred in his heart and complete disgust towards his creation, Frankenstein himself was ethically dead.

Mary Shelley’s novel presents numerous aspects of debate for the people of every era and is highly relevant even two centuries later. Every day, humanity suffers the consequences of actions carried out by individuals who play God, just like in Frankenstein. While the advancements in science have eased human life, one cannot ignore the horrors it brings when manipulated with no regard for the results. On the one hand, science has equipped man with ways to prolong life, while on the other, the dire consequences of man’s desire to be omnipotent have unleashed evil that claims millions of lives through medical procedures, the development of biomedical weapons, and war.

## Work Cited

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