

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Morally Relevant Issues

a. The deliberate production, use and destruction of living human embryos

1. The Bible sees human life as significant from conception.

Psalm 139:13-16 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. 14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; 16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained *for me*, When as yet there was not one of them.

Job 10:8-12 'Your hands fashioned and made me altogether, And would You destroy me? 9 'Remember now, that You have made me as clay; And would You turn me into dust again? 10 'Did You not pour me out like milk And curdle me like cheese; 11 Clothe me with skin and flesh, And knit me together with bones and sinews? 12 'You have granted me life and lovingkindness; And Your care has preserved my spirit.

Job 31:15 "Did not He who made me in the womb make him, And the same one fashion us in the womb?"

2. God even takes credit for “birth defects.” Exodus 4:11; John 9:1-3

3. The Bible makes no distinction between a baby in the womb and a baby its mother’s arms.

OT Hebrew- yeled cf Exodus 21:4, 22

NT Greek- brephos- Luke 1:41,44 cf 2:12,16

b. Equally promising, yet less morally problematic approaches

We are discovering that adult stem cells are common, plentiful, powerful, and potent. We have isolated them from nearly every single type of human tissue.

The Journal of Neuroscience reported, “Adult spinal cord stem cells (can) generate neurons after transplantation.”

UCLA Medical Center announced that transplantation of stem cells taken from the umbilical cord blood saved the lives of three young boys with defective immune systems. They underwent stem cell therapy with their own stem cells so successfully that doctors at **UCLA Medical Center** publicly pronounced the boys cured.

BBC August 2003 reported, “A blind man in California can see after being given an adult stem cell transplant.”

New Scientist (April 2003) “Adult Stem Cells Tackle Multiple Sclerosis.”

New York Times (March 2003) “US doctors use bone marrow cells to repair heart.”

Readers Digest (August 2005)-

Caritas St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center in Boston- Used of bone marrow stem cells to fix heart muscle damaged by heart attack.

Japan’s Osaka University Medical School- Man nearly blind- Eyes fixed with stem cells taken from the inside of his cheek.

- c. The risk of allowing the goodness of the ends to justify moral indifference to the means used to achieve it

Suffering should not be opposed by any means possible.

We are morally obligated to seek relief of suffering, but only in ways that preserve moral integrity.

In moral debates about these matters, people often speak as if saving lives is the only value that counts and that everything else must be sacrificed.

Others speak as if any failure to prevent death or suffering from disease is sinful.

Research must be judged by the means it employs.

The Nuremburg Code, Helsinki Declaration, Belmont Report

The case for embryonic stem cell research should not consist simply of guessing how many people might be saved and how many might be lost.

To be human is to be mortal. To be alive is to be vulnerable to suffering.

Is destroying an embryo at the blastocyst stage morally the same as killing a child? Is it the same as clipping a fingernail?

Should we take the life of woman A's unborn baby to save the life of woman B.

There is a danger that some researchers will develop the embryos beyond the blastocyst stage for research purposes.

ARGUMENTS OF THOSE WHO SEE NO MORAL DILEMNA

1. A blastocyst lacks any trace of a nervous system and has no capacity for suffering or conscious experience.
2. Most early-stage embryos that are produced naturally through sexual intercourse fail to implant and are therefore wasted or destroyed.
3. The widely accepted practice of using organs from brain-dead human beings sets a moral precedence.
4. Every human cell has the genetic potential to develop into a complete human being if used in cloning efforts to produce a child. If mere potentiality to develop into a human being is enough to make something morally human, then every human cell has a special or inviolable moral status, a view that is patently absurd.

THE MORAL CASE AGAINST EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

There are other promising results in research with non-embryonic stem cells.

The burden of persuasion lies with the proponents to show not only that embryonic research is promising or desirable, but that it is necessary to gain the sought-for medical benefits.

1. What We Owe The Embryo

It is not just a clump of cells but an integrated, self-developing whole, capable of the continued organic development characteristic of human beings.

Though it only has the potential for the full range of characteristics that distinguish human species from others.

This is likewise true of the elderly, handicapped and they do not forfeit their humanity simply from want of the distinguishing characteristics.

We have a continuous history from zygote to irreversible coma.

Efforts to assign to the embryo a merely intermediate and developing moral status are both biologically and morally unsustainable.

The embryo is fully one of us.

A human in process

An equal member of the human species in the embryonic stage of natural development

It is self-contradictory to claim that the human embryos deserve special respect and endorse nonetheless research that requires the creation, use, and destruction of these organisms.

The case for treating the early-stage embryo as simply the moral equivalent of all other human cells is entirely unconvincing.

It denies the continuous human history of individuals from zygote to fetus to infant to child.

It misunderstands the meaning of potential.

Specifically the difference between a “being-on-the-way” and a pile of raw materials which has no definite potential and might become anything at all.

It ignores the hazardous moral precedent that the routine creation, use and destruction of nascent human life would establish for other areas of scientific research and social life.

Attempts to ground the special respect owed to a maturing embryo in its developmental features do not succeed.

We are not persuaded by the argument that fourteen days marks a significant difference in moral status.

The embryos human and individual genetic identity is present from the start.

Nothing happens later during the continuous development that follows that is responsible for suddenly conferring on them human individuality or identity

Changes that occur at fourteen days are merely the visibly evident culmination of more subtle changes that have taken place earlier and that are driving the organism toward maturity.

There are problems with the claim that the capacity for “twinning” proves that the early embryo is not yet an individual.

The capacity for twinning may simply be one of the characteristic capacities of an individual human organism at a particular stage of development, just as the capacity for crawling, walking, etc.

If one locus of moral status can become two, its moral standing does not thereby diminish but rather increases.

An embryo is by definition and by its nature potentially a fully developed human person.

Its potential for maturation is a characteristic it actually has from the start.

The limited ability of an IVF embryo to realize their natural capacities does not affect either the potential or the moral status of the beings themselves.

A bird force to live in a cage its entire life may never learn to fly, but this does not mean that it is any less a bird.

It only means that a caged bird- like an in vitro human embryo- has been deprived of its proper environment.

It is difficult to imagine that biotechnology companies or scientist who routinely engage in IVF for bio-medical research would evince respect for human life each time an embryo was used and destroyed.

Things we exploit even occasionally tend to lose their special value.

We might grieve differently at the death of a healthy eight-year-old more than the death of a severely demented eighty-year-old or an eight week embryo.

Nevertheless these emotions, quite naturally and appropriately different, would be misused if we calibrated the degree of respect we owe each other on the basis of these responses.

2. What We Owe to Society

Conducting such research makes us into a different society.

- a. Less humble toward that which we cannot fully understand.
- b. Less willing to extend the boundaries of human respect ever outward.
- c. More willing to transgress moral boundaries that we have established once it appears to be in our own interest to do so.

The reasons justifying the production of IVF embryos for research can be predicted to expand.

Today the demand for stem cells, tomorrow it may be for embryonic and fetal organs.

What disturbs us today we quickly or eventually get used to.

Yesterday's repugnance gives way to tomorrow's endorsement.

Such as experiments creating animal-human hybrid animals.

Cloning children

*Cloning for spare parts (cf movies like, *The Clones*, and *The Island*)*

History so often demonstrates powers gained for one purpose are often used for other less noble ones.

The knowledge that provides this power does not teach us how to use it.

3. What We Owe to the Suffering

We cannot suppose that living the moral life comes without cost. There may be occasions when the only means available to achieving a desired end is a means that would be wrong to employ.

People sometimes imagine that they are responsible for all the harms they could prevent but do not, but this is not true.

Life itself loses its value if we care only for how long we live, and not also for how we live.

Future sufferers might say to us: "You might have helped us by approving stem cell research, but you declined to do so." What could we say to them?

Yes, but we could have done so only by destroying the sort of world in which both we and you want to live.

A world in which we respect human life and human individuals, the weak and the strong

History teaches that it is dangerous to assume that, because our motives are praiseworthy and our hope is to heal, our actions cannot possibly violate or diminish human well-being.

Indeed we may be least likely to see the dangers when we are the most confident of the goodness of our cause.

The Nature of the Moral Argument

At first glance, people seem to be disagreeing about whether a balancing of competing interests and goods is called for, or whether some one overriding moral duty ought to shape our judgment.

Moral questions are often analyzed in the language of “weighing” and “balancing,” or else in terms of overriding concerns, inviolable principles, or fundamental “rights.” These two sets of terms and metaphors point to two distinct ways of making difficult moral judgments.

A substantial portion of the opposition to the research rests upon the belief that human embryos should not be violated- therefore that the threat to their life cannot be justified by the promise of research.

The moral issue may depend, in many cases, on one’s understanding of the moral standing of the human embryos.

Many observers argue that the proper governing principle should be the duty to relieve the pain and suffering of others.

The duty to find cures for disease cannot be an unqualified or absolute imperative.

An unwillingness to violate one’s moral principles in order to relieve the sick does not make one responsible for their sickness.

The Moral Standing Of Human Embryos

When does human life begin?

That question has as its unstated premise the fact that under normal circumstances we regard all born human beings as possessing equal moral worth and meriting equal legal protection.

a. The Case for Continuity

A human embryo is an organic whole, a living member of the human species in the earliest stage of natural development, and that, given the appropriate environment, it will, by self-directed integral organic functioning, develop progressively to the next more mature stage and become first a human fetus, and then a human infant.

Every adult human being around us is the same individual who, at an earlier stage of life was a human embryo.

Before fertilization, no new individual exists. After the sperm and egg are joined, the new entity is transformed into a being capable of its own internally self-directed development.

By itself, no sperm or egg has the potential to become an adult, but zygotes by their very nature do.

Regardless of their particular powers, size, or appearance, there are no grounds for denying the earliest human embryo full moral standing as a person.

It is dangerous to begin to assign moral worth on the basis of the presence or absence of particular capacities and features.

b. The Case for Discontinuity.

1. The primitive streak

Around the 14th day is the earliest visible structure that defines the region of the vertebral column.

Before this twinning can occur therefore they argue that prior to the primitive streak, the embryo lacks individuality and hence also moral status.

2. Nervous System

There is no designated biological origin of a human characteristic such as consciousness.

But we contend that the human being is from the start an inseparable psycho-physical unity.

3. Human form

But we contend that humans have different external forms and shapes throughout their lives.

While it is certainly true that human beings at different stages of development are not to be treated the same (as children are not given the responsibilities of adults), the crucial treatment here at is destructive treatment.

Random Statements.

Adult stem cells are already curing many diseases in clinical trials all over the world. Adult stem cell research has led to breakthroughs in treating Parkinson's, spinal cord injuries, and juvenile diabetes. (These stem cells are taken from the cord blood or the tissue of people who give consent.)

Embryonic stem cells have proven difficult to work with. They are hard to control and they often turn into tumors. Despite all the hype, embryonic stem cell research has failed to provide a single treatment.

From a biblical point of view, human value and dignity do not depend on what we can do or have the potential to do.

The embryo is killed for the benefit of a sick person who is different from the embryo only because he or she is older. This is "high-tech cannibalism."

Embryonic stem cell research is taking a significant step toward a society in which human beings are grown for spare body parts.

The destruction of human embryos for experimentation is not necessary to achieve the promises of stem cell therapy.

The National Academy of Sciences, the National Research Council, and the University of Wisconsin show that to treat just 10% of all potential patients, 13.4 million genetically thatched human embryos would have to be created and destroyed.

Therapy using stem cells from one's own body completely avoids the problem of rejection and the ethical dilemma of destroying human embryos disappears.

Biblical Testimony

**1. There is no distinction in concept or term for a child before birth and after birth.
Exodus 21:4, 22; Luke 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; 18:15; cf Acts 7:19**

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word yeled is used for both a child in the womb and out of the womb.

Exodus 21:4, 22

In the New Testament the Greek word *brephos* is used for a child before and after birth.

2. A child is said to die in the womb. Job 10:18-19

Job 10:18-19 'Why then have You brought me out of the womb? Would that I had died and no eye had seen me! 19 'I should have been as though I had not been, Carried from womb to tomb.'

3. An aborted child is said to be killed. Jeremiah 20:17-18

Jeremiah 20:17-18 Because he did not kill me before birth, So that my mother would have been my grave, And her womb ever pregnant. 18 Why did I ever come forth from the womb To look on trouble and sorrow, So that my days have been spent in shame?

4. God is intimately involved with a child before birth. Psalm 139:13-16; Job 10:8-12; 31:15

Job 31:15 "Did not He who made me in the womb make him, And the same one fashion us in the womb?"

5. God takes credit for "birth defects." Exodus 4:11; John 9:1-3

I have watched the arguments and issues over the status of the fetus change in the debate over the last several years.

The child in the womb has gone from being called a baby to being called a fetus or the product of conception.

In the beginning some said in was just *a blob of tissue- like a tumor*

Then it was a *part of the mother* like an appendix or a hangnail.

But it contains separate genetic material and is often a different gender.

It was then said not to be alive, just *potential life*.

But it is metabolizing and has a beating heart.

It was next admitted to being *alive, but a parasite*.

This is a ridiculous argument because parasites are of a different specie.

Then it was called alive, but *not human*.

What is it, a frog?

It has human genetics.

A few years ago the baby was admitted to be a human life, but many said that it did not have a *quality of life* that needed to be preserved or protected.

This is the same argument by some who advocate disposing of the handicapped.

This is the same argument used by Nazi Germany.

Hitler had 276,000 "useless eaters" killed in Germany before he went after the Jews.

The "useless eaters" included disabled WW I veterans, the elderly, retarded, handicapped, and mentally ill.

Leo Alexander, who was the psychiatric consultant for the Nuremberg Trials, has said that in his opinion the Holocaust occurred because someone decided that there was a human life not worthy to be lived.

Albert Schweitzer- “ If a man loses reverence for any part of life, he will lose his reverence for all of life.”

The main argument today revolves around *utilitarian uses of the baby for our desired purposes.*

One person put it this way, “Innocent people sometimes have to die for greater purposes and causes.”

An individual’s right to choose ends where another’s *life* begins.

Both God and the government set up laws to protect people from the wrongful choices of others.

My rights end at the end of your nose.

All laws are based on someone’s moral values.

We have speed limits in school zones because most people believe that a child’s right to live is more important than you and I having the choice of how fast we want to drive.

Laws exist to protect people from the wrongful choices of others.

This is why we have laws against:

Child molesting

Rape

Slavery

Genocide (the Holocaust)

Most people agree that the right to life takes precedent over the right to choose.

Who Should Make The Choice?

a. The individual?

Then there are no limits.

It’s not up to the individual to set their own standards of right and wrong.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a **way** which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

b. The majority?

The majority of Germans backed Adolf Hitler and 55 million people died in World War II.

c. Politicians?

The government has the responsibility to protect the weak from the strong and the corrupt.

But many politicians are more interested in PAC money and staying in office than in right and wrong.

d. Judges?

Again, it is the responsibility of those in power to protect people from harm and the oppressive acts of others.

But judges can be wrong as in the Dred Scott case.

e. God

Ultimately, God is the only one qualified to set the standards of right and wrong.

The one with the absolute answer is God.

His word indicates that life begins in the womb.

The one who has the right to set the rules is God.

He forbids the taking of life except capital punishment in very limited and defined cases

All unauthorized willful taking of human life is considered murder.