

## The Inscrutable Question: Stem-Cell Research & Therapy: Since Human Life Begins at Physical Birth Procedure is Moral if Supported by Donors

### How are pluripotent stem cells derived?

At present, human pluripotent cell lines have been developed from two sources.

(1) In the work done by Dr. James Thomson (University of Wisconsin at Madison), pluripotent stem cells were isolated directly from the inner cell mass of human embryos at the blastocyst stage. Dr. Thomson received embryos from IVF (In Vitro Fertilization) clinics-these embryos were in excess of the clinical need for infertility treatment. The embryos were made for purposes of reproduction, not research. Informed consent was obtained from the donor couples. Dr. Thomson isolated the inner cell mass (see Figure III) and cultured these cells producing a pluripotent stem cell line.

(2) In contrast, Dr. John Gearhart (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Maryland) isolated pluripotent stem cells from fetal tissue obtained from terminated pregnancies. Informed consent was obtained from the donors after they had independently made the decision to terminate their pregnancy. (Figure III)

### Potential Applications of Pluripotent Stem Cells

Perhaps the most far-reaching potential application of human pluripotent stem cells is the generation of cells and tissue that could be used for so-called "cell therapies." Many diseases and disorders result from disruption of cellular function or destruction of tissues of the body. Today, donated organs and tissues are often used to replace ailing or destroyed tissue. Unfortunately, the number of people suffering from these disorders far outstrips the number of organs available for transplantation. Pluripotent stem cells, stimulated to develop into specialized cells, offer the possibility of a renewable source of replacement cells and tissue to treat a myriad of diseases, conditions, and disabilities including Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, spinal cord injury, stroke, burns, heart disease, diabetes, osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. There is almost no realm of medicine that might not be touched by this innovation.

- 22- Early research strongly suggests that the use of stem cells will have major impact on the cure of serious and debilitating diseases and could thus be a monumental breakthrough in medical science. But the question still remains, "Is it moral?"
- 23- First of all, biological life, from zygote to delivery, is not human life. God creates life and Scripture is clear that He imputes soul life to biological life at physical birth.
- 24- This is a crucial principle in the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. If human life begins in the womb at conception then soul life would have to be imputed to a zygote. Consequently, Mary would become the mother of God. This is blasphemous and unthinkable, yet this is what is implied by those in the Pro Life Lobby who insist that human life begins at conception.
- 25- Protestant denominations that decry the heresy of Mariolatry in essence agree in principle with the "mother of God" dogma when they assert that life begins at conception.
- 26- We have studied the origin of human life and established that viability occurs as early as the twentieth week of gestation but certainly by the beginning of the third trimester. We have examined the medical profession's Hippocratic Oath. The opening section of its second paragraph reads verbatim as follows:

The regimen I adopt shall be for the benefit of my patients according to my ability and judgment, and not for their hurt or for any wrong. I will give no deadly drug to any, though it be asked of me, nor will I counsel such, and especially I will not aid a woman to procure abortion. Whatsoever house I enter, there will I go for the benefit of the sick, refraining from all wrongdoing or corruption.

Abortion is a medical term that refers to the “expulsion of a nonviable fetus, or the spontaneous expulsion of a human fetus during the first 12 weeks of gestation.” This is commonly called a miscarriage. Abortions can also be induced and these are the ones that are the subject of an intractable debate. Both sides have radicals. The Pro Life position bases its stand on the false doctrine that life begins at conception and therefore all abortion must be prohibited by law and considered murder. The Pro Abortion position bases its stand on the false doctrine that a pregnant woman has a right to choose between life and death for an unborn child anywhere between conception and physical birth.

- 27- Human sexuality often results in pregnancy. When it occurs its ultimate end is the delivery of a fully developed infant. On occasion the fetus does not develop properly and miscarriages or spontaneous abortions happen. On even more rare occasions circumstances require the medical practitioner to advise the woman, and, if she has one, the husband, that an induced abortion is necessary to resolve a problem that involves her health. Her decision to resort to an induced abortion is one that must be reached in counsel with her husband and her doctor.
- 28- However, such circumstances are so rare that the resolution of them should be left completely up to those directly involved. And when the procedure is performed it is not to be considered murder. No abortion is murder except for the inappropriately named procedure called “partial birth abortion” which is, in fact, nothing less than infanticide.
- 29- The critical issue in the debate over abortion is “viability.” This is the point in gestation where if the fetus should be expelled from the womb that it could conceivably survive on its own. A time comes during gestation where the fetus could successfully switch from mother dependence over to God dependence. Fetal development must advance to a certain level before God is able to impute soul life and sustain independent function. That point occurs no earlier than the twentieth week of pregnancy. Usually, the more accurate figure is around the twenty-fourth week of gestation or the third trimester.
- 30- Consequently, blastocysts that are retained in fertility clinics are ideal sources for stem-cell research and there is no biblical reason that they could not be used. The use of remains from aborted fetuses if made legal would eventually result in women becoming pregnant in order to sell their embryos to science. This is not a legitimate reason to terminate a pregnancy and should not be considered by government or justified for scientific research.
- 31- However, there is even a more common sense approach to the issue. Rarely does anyone have a problem with contributing blood to the Red Cross. Many find no harm in checking the “organ transplant” box on the back of their drivers’ licenses.
- 32- Transplanting of livers, kidneys, and hearts is common place and is so successful that no one even suggests that donors are immoral if they designate these organs to others in need.
- 33- Question: What therefore would be immoral about contributing ova and sperm to laboratories that conduct scientific research into the potential benefits of stem-cell therapy? And if it proves successful, what on earth would be wrong with contributing ova and sperm to laboratories which could develop cures for Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s diseases, spinal cord injuries, strokes, burns, heart disease, diabetes, osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis? Yet the major opposition comes from Christian circles based on the blasphemous doctrine that human beings can create life in the womb. Here’s an example from:

Bevington, Linda. “Stem Cells and the Human Embryo.” (Bannockburn: The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, 2001): <http://www.bioethix.org/resources/overviews/stemcell.html>

**Why should we value the human embryo?**

Underlying the passages of Scripture that refer to the unborn (Job 31:15; Psa. 139:13-16; Isa. 49:1; Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 1:3-4) is the assumption that they are human beings who are created, known, and uniquely valued by God. Genesis 9:6 warns us against killing our fellow humanity, who are created in the very image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Furthermore, human embryonic life--as well as all of creation--exists primarily for God's own pleasure and purpose, not ours (Col. 1:16).

- 34- These verses constitute Ms Bevington's only source to support her contention that stem-cell research and therapy should not go forward. Some of these verses do present problems from English translations of the Bible but which in reality are not supportive of her thesis when examined in the Hebrew and the Greek. Some listed are not even pertinent to the discussion, e.g., Ephesians 1:3-4, Genesis 9:6, Genesis 1:26-27, and Colossians 1:16.
- 35- We will not take up an analysis of the other verses since we are not studying the origin of life. If you are interested in pursuing this subject I recommend the Colonel's book, *The Origin of Human Life*. Copies are available in the book cabinet. Many of Ms Bevington's problem passages are treated in the chapter, "Misunderstood Passages."
- 36- Unfortunately, stem-cell therapy will not be limited to the treatment of dread diseases but will no doubt enter into a number of areas that will in all probability violate the rules of engagement in the angelic conflict.
- 37- It appears to me that medical research in stem-cell therapy that is designed to treat dread diseases and *donor* eggs and sperm come from willing participants then in all likelihood this could well be in the directive will of God.
- 38- But once we begin to play God, attempt to do those things that would unbalance the order of the plan of God, and threaten to tip the advantage in the appeal trial to Lucifer's side, divine justice will flow down like a mighty stream.
- 39- Whatever our opinions, both human cloning and stem-cell therapy are on the horizon and both will most likely occur. We shall with curiosity and patience await God's opinion of these subjects. Just as where homosexuality is being trumped by the AIDs virus, so also there is a divine trump card for these ideas should they too require the overruling will of God.
- 40- In conclusion, I personally do not promote or discourage either of these ideas. It seems to me that cloning is an obvious violation of the divine order but may fall under God's permissive will. Stem-cell therapy does not violate human life and can be applied as objectively as blood transfusions and organ transplants. However, the principle of unintended consequences lurks here as well.
- 41- There is nothing we can do to stop these things from being tried. God can select Clones or not. It's His call. He may desire that we discover cures for dread diseases. He has obviously permitted organ transplants, why not stem-cell implants? Time will tell and we shall see.
- 42- We can have confidence from our study of the *Bene ha Elohim* and the *Nephilim* of Genesis 6 that if God is not amused He will use his sovereign overruling will to correct the problem and restore order to the *cosmos*.