

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska
29-30 August 2009

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

EMBRYONIC VS. ADULT STEM CELL RESEARCH

An enormous ethical crisis is brewing in the United States over stem cell research. It is one for which genuine biblical Christianity should be both informed and concerned. Recently, President Obama lifted the ban on federal funding using embryonic stem cells. That ban, established by President Bush on 9 August 2001, restricted federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. It did permit such research but using only stem cell lines in existence at the time of Bush's ban. With that ban now lifted, the ethical dimensions of the practice of killing human embryos to acquire stem cells is once again on the front burner.

In this *Perspective*, I want to contrast the ethical implications of using both adult stem cells and embryonic stem cells. I am on the Advisory Board of the Nebraska Coalition for Ethical Research (NCER), an outstanding organization in my state promoting careful and well-reasoned ethical consideration of a host of important medical procedures. It is an honor to serve this organization. NCER recently published a series of position papers on several important medical procedures or technologies. I am drawing on these papers as we consider the ethical implications of these two sources for stem cells.

1. The Ethical Implications of Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research: NCER makes the case that human embryonic stem cell research (hESC) is immoral and must be banned because it violates the life, dignity, and rights of human beings. Here is why.

- **Every human being has a right to life**
The harvesting of human embryonic stem cells deliberately destroys embryonic human beings.
- **Every human being has a right to be protected from discrimination**
Human embryonic stem cell research discriminates against human embryos on the basis of developmental immaturity.
- **Every human being is an end to be loved, not a means to be used for another's end**
Human embryonic stem cell research treats the embryonic human being as an object to be valued for its parts. To categorize so-called spare embryos as "having no future" or as "going to be destroyed anyway" is to rationalize the destruction of one human being to possibly benefit the health of another.
- **Every human being is of equal value to every other human being**
Human embryonic stem cell research treats the embryonic human being as less valuable than a fetus, a neonate, or an adult.

- **Research involving human subjects requires that proxy or presumed consent can be given only if the research does not harm the subject**
Human embryonic stem cell research is, by its very nature, destructive. Therefore, proxy or presumed consent for such research is not ethically valid.
- **The goal of research involving human subjects is to serve humanity by curing disease and relieving suffering**
Human embryonic stem cell research destroys, rather than heals, the human embryos involved. Any therapies developed from human embryonic stem cells are ill-gotten gains because the benefit to some human beings requires the death of other human beings.
- **The rules of ethical human research demand that scientists pursue the least morally controversial of available options when these prove to be equally beneficial**
Most of the goals of human embryonic stem cell research can be obtained through the use of non-embryonic stem cells, without any destruction of human life.
- **Failure to protect embryonic and fetal human life, the most vulnerable of human beings, erodes the moral fiber of our society**
Human embryonic stem cell research does not accord embryonic human beings the protection that is their due as human subjects of research. An assault against any innocent human being is an assault on humanity in general. Since respect for human life is a cornerstone of civilization, human embryonic stem cell research will weaken the moral foundation of our society.

2. The Ethical Implications of Adult Stem Cell Research: NCER argues that human adult stem cell research (hASC) is moral and should be supported because it does not violate the life, dignity, and rights of human beings if done in the proper context and with informed consent. Here is why.

- **Every human being has a right to life**
Use of hASCs preserves life, whereas the harvesting of hESC's deliberately destroys human life at the embryonic stage of development.
- **Every human being has a right to be protected from discrimination**
Since hESC research destroys a living human embryo, this research discriminates against human beings on the basis of developmental immaturity.
- **Every human being is an end to be loved, not a means to be used for someone else's end**
Human ASC research allows a person to participate in scientific research to help find treatments for disease. With proper informed consent, one may donate hASC for his/her own benefit or the benefit of society. Human ESC research treats the embryonic human being as an object to be valued for its parts. To categorize so-called spare embryos as "having no future" or as "going to be destroyed anyway" is to rationalize the destruction of one human being as a possible benefit for the health of another.
- **Every human being is of equal value to every other human being**
Human ASC research does not place one person's life above that of another. Human ESC research treats the embryonic human being as less valuable than a fetus, a newborn, or an adult.
- **Human subject research requires that proxy or presumed consent can be given only if the research does not harm the subject**

Valid consent may be obtained for hASC research because the subject is not harmed. Human ESC research is, by its very nature, destructive. Therefore, proxy or presumed consent for such research is not ethically valid.

- **The goal of human subject research is to serve humanity by curing disease and relieving suffering**

Because someone who donates ASCs is not harmed in an attempt to help others who are sick and suffering, hASC research realizes the fundamental goals of medicine and medical research in a non-destructive way. On the other hand, harvesting hESC destroys, rather than heals, the human embryos involved. Any therapies developed from hESC's are ill-gotten gains because the benefit to some human beings who are sick requires the death of other human beings.

- **The rules of ethical research demand that researchers pursue the least morally controversial of available options when these prove to be equally beneficial**

Most of the goals of destructive hESC research can be obtained through the use of non-embryonic stem cells, without any destruction of human life. Therefore, the use of hASCs for research and therapies should be pursued.

- **Failure to protect embryonic and fetal human life, the most vulnerable of human beings, erodes the moral fiber of society**

The use of hASCs can save human life and strengthen society without the negative effects on the individual and society that are inherent in the use of hESCs. Human ESC research does not accord embryonic human beings the protection that is their due as human subjects of research. An assault against any innocent human being is an assault on humanity in general. Since respect for human life is a cornerstone of our civilization, hESC research will weaken the moral foundation of our society.

See "Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research Position Paper," and "Human Adult Stem Cell Research Position Paper," both published by the Nebraska Coalition for Ethical Research (17330 West Center Road, Suite 110, Omaha, NE 68130).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

SUCCESS ON THE WEST BANK

By all measures, President Obama has made the settlement issue in the West Bank the touchstone item for moving Israel and the Arab community toward a comprehensive peace agreement. He has demanded that Israel freeze these settlements in the West Bank arguing that "Settlements have to be stopped in order for us to move forward." Every presidential administration since the 1967 war (i.e., nine presidents) has made the same demand. More than 120 settlements have been constructed over the past 42 years, and the Israeli population in the West Bank now totals 190,000 in the Jerusalem area and 289,000 elsewhere. What is now different is that Obama is making this singular issue the hallmark of his policy. Israel must end all settlements! The Arab community (e.g., Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc.) is saying: Before it makes any concessions to Israel, Israel must emphatically and decisively end all settlements—and some are even arguing for the dismantlement all settlements planted since 1967. Israel counters that these settlements are a part of dealing with its "natural growth." Furthermore, the Arab community has never been serious about making peace so "why should we make this decisive

step with no guarantees from them?” As all previous presidents have discovered, this is an intractable issue for both sides.

But there is also some positive and encouraging news coming from the West Bank. As Michael Oren, Israel’s ambassador to the US, recently reported: The West Bank has experienced a 7% growth rate, declining unemployment, a thriving tourist industry and a 24% hike in the average daily wage. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the West Bank economy is flourishing. The IMF also reports an 18% increase in the local stock exchange, a 94% growth of tourism to Bethlehem—generating 6,000 new jobs—and an 82% rise in trade with Israel. Since 2008, more than 2,000 new companies have been registered with the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Where there was once war and terrorism, there is now security and an economic boom. What has produced the change?

1. The wise and responsible fiscal policy of Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad, who is an American-educated leader, is part of the reason.
2. There is a vastly improved security environment—2,100 members of the Palestinian security forces, graduates of an innovative program led by US general Keith Dayton, now patrol seven major cities. This improved security environment has fostered astounding increases in trade and finance.
3. As Tony Blair recently remarked, Israel must be given credit as well. It has removed dozens of checkpoints and road blocks, withdrawing Israeli troops from population centers and facilitating transportation into both Israel and Jordan. As a result, there has been a 200% increase in agricultural exports and a nearly 1,000% increase in the number of trucks importing produce into the West Bank from Israel.
4. Oren reports that “the West Bank’s population is building sovereignty from the bottom-up forging the law-enforcement, civil, and finance institutions that form the underpinnings of any modern polity.”

All of this positive change is in distinct contrast to Gaza, administered by Hamas. There is 40% unemployment there. Instead of investing in new shopping centers and restaurants, Hamas is spending millions on rockets and mortar shells. Palestinians in Gaza had better take notice of their West Bank counterparts. Which Palestinian leadership is really serving the interests of the Palestinians? Hamas or Fatah? Prime Minister Fayyad decided after the seizure of Gaza by Hamas that the West Bank Palestinian Authority would deliver on transparent, accountable administration and services. His policy is working! He is showing that focusing on development and delivering services to the people is far wiser and more beneficial than focusing on terrorism. Hamas and Hezbollah should look to Fayyad, not Iran, if it wants to see what its future could really look like. What is occurring on the West Bank is one of the greatest sources of optimism and hope for the Palestinian people and for the greater Middle East the world has seen in decades. By God’s grace, may it continue.

See David Ignatius in the *Washington Post* (4 June 2009); Michael Oren in the *Wall Street Journal* (14 August 2009); and Thomas Friedman in the *New York Times* (5 August 2009).