Ethics and the Embryo

A Collaborative Project of Ohio Right to Life and Cedarville University

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www.cedarville.edu/bioethics
The Challenge Before Us . . .
Eight Weeks After Conception:
Sixteen Weeks from Conception:
Twenty Weeks:
Counseling the Abortion-Minded Client:

- At six weeks of gestation, a heartbeat is present on U/S
- At eight weeks, all body systems are fully functional
- Also at eight weeks, movement may be visible (including sucking the thumb)
- At ten weeks, the developing baby begins to look more like a person
- At twelve weeks, pregnancy moves into the second trimester and abortion becomes more dangerous medically
Public Policy Implications of All This:

- The Pro-Life movement has a clear-cut public awareness case against abortion
- “Seeing” the unborn baby makes an emotional connection (e.g. use of U/S in CPCs)
- Most polls show more opposition to abortion as pregnancy proceeds (e.g., > 70% against PBA)
- In addition to the “personhood” arguments, there are harms to the mother:
  - Increased risks of premature labor
  - Mental and emotional costs
  - Higher rates of breast cancer
How Do We Advocate for These?
The Modern Context

• A new debate
• Cameron: “The Biotech Century”
• Birth of this modern era:
  • July 25, 1978 (Great Britain)
  • Louise Joy Brown
• Beginning of modern reproductive technologies
Components of organs
- Parenchyma: functional cells
- Stroma: connective tissue

Regeneration vs. repair
- Regeneration: replacement from parenchyma
- Repair: filling in the gap by fibrous scar tissue (stroma)

What we normally get = repair
- Stroke, spinal cord injury, Parkinson’s Disease
- Heart attacks, diabetes

What we would like to see happen = regeneration!
The Ethical Conundrum

- What is at stake: Our culture’s view of human life
- But pro-life forces are at a disadvantage:
  - Embryonic stem cell research is complex
  - Proponents often distort the facts (e.g., “Missouri Cures Initiative”)
  - Emotional case favors the proponents
  - Opposition appears to be unkind and uninformed
- The answer lies in education!
Ethics and the Embryo

- In Feb. 2008, the ORTL Board authorized creation of an educational DVD
  - Partnership with Cedarville University’s Center for bioethics
  - Multimedia design, early college level
  - Engaging, entertaining, informative
  - Designed for individual use, or for Sunday School and Prayer Group leaders
Major Topic Areas

- Theology
  - Creation
  - Fall
  - Redemption
  - Consummation
- Ethics
  - Thinking ethically
  - Where do ethical rules come from?
  - Ethical conflicts
- Personhood
  - What does it mean to be a person?
  - What does Scripture say?
Major Topic Areas (cont.)

- Reproductive Biology
  - Male and female anatomy
  - Sexuality
  - Human reproduction and pregnancy
- Human Embryology
  - Fertilization
  - Implantation
  - Early development
Major Topic Areas (cont.)

• Applications
  • Contraception and family planning
  • Medical and surgical methods of abortion
  • Reproductive technologies
  • Embryonic stem cell research
  • Human cloning
  • Genetic manipulation and eugenics
  • Animal/Human hybrids
  • Biotechnology and the future
Examples
The “Image of God”

- What does this mean?
- Let’s make a list of the possibilities!!
Summary of Views:

- **Structural views**: ways human nature is related to God’s nature
- **Relational view**: social character of man in his ability to relate to God and others
- **Functional view**: emphasis is on man’s stewardship over creation
Image of God: List of Characteristics

• **Structural**
  • holiness
  • moral nature
  • creativity
  • rationality
  • volition
  • compassion
  • self-awareness
  • intellect

• **Relational**
  • communicates
  • makes friends
  • can relate to God
  • social skills

• **Functional**
  • “imager” of God
  • fulfills stewardship role

What is the Danger Here?
Image of God: List of Characteristics

- **Structural**
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MIND GAMES
on the IMAGE OF GOD:
Taking Apart a Car
MIND GAMES on the IMAGE OF GOD:
Taking Apart a Person (volunteer, please?)
Human Personhood

• Continuity arguments
  • Francis Schaeffer: “Ten minutes before that . . .”
  • Acorns and oak trees

• What is the meaning of “human dignity?”

• How does embryo destruction hurt our culture?

• What lessons can we learn from history?
  • Eugenics
  • Human experimentation
Ethics

- Sources of ethical rules
- Understanding ethical conflicts
- What does it mean to say: “We should support embryo-destructive research because of the greater good?”
  - What is the “greater good?”
  - What ethical values are in conflict?
- Stem cell research and “life-boat” scenarios
Human Biology

- What level?
- Who exactly is our audience?
- Male and female reproduction
- Pregnancy
- Birth control?
- What stance should we take?
  - “balanced”
  - Ethically neutral
  - Need to avoid strong ideological bias
Issues

- Medical and surgical methods of abortion
- How explicit?
- Approach: shock v. subtlety?
- Reproductive technologies
- Ethically neutral?
- Utilitarian v. principalist approach
- Stem cell research:
  - What are the principle arguments?
  - How does cloning fit into this?
- Genetics and human perfectionism
The Overall "Look"

- The War Room or Command Center
- Video v. audio
- Talking heads or walking body
- Groups of students
- Health care professionals
- Pastors/Priests
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