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BIOETHICS -- The Masters, the Slaves and the Martyrs in a Cloning Society

Cloning and embryonic stem cell (ESC) research have appeared again in the front lines in the world media. Two articles published in Singapore captured the debate in depth with its clearly divergent views. The first article *"Send in the clones- for a good cause"* in Today (May 17, 2006) attempts to introduce and display the promises to come from ESC research and cloning. But it stops there: words and promises without a single real fact. The second article titled *"Science under the moral microscope"* that appeared in the Strait Times (May 22, 2006) went far beyond science to bring into perspective the respect we ought to have for human goods, and as such, human life: it is a-back-to-the-reality of principles.

We should look at the data and make a sensible call to all this events, not just from the human biology point of view but also from the practical and therapeutic stand. And this analysis seems to indicate, looking at the facts exposed at www.stemcellresearch.org and the literature selection at www.bioethicsforum.info about the ability of the adult and cord blood stem cells to cure patients. It seems that adult stem cells do succeed in the "clinic" cure patients while the ESC seem to be lacking any therapeutic potential, besides destroying human life: Biological potential is very different from clinical (or therapeutical potential). However, looking at data alone is not enough to come to a sound judgment on the matter. As any research on human beings interact with the human goods, we must look also beyond the data and assess the effect on the human goods. In this case life, human life in a society.

This is an additional thought that I would like to bring here - it is usually a forgotten thought. It is that ESC research and cloning technology advocate for a two-tier human beings society of masters and slaves. The masters generate IVF babies, screen them, select the perfect one (under their subjective criterion), put it into the womb of a want-to-be-a-mother and collect the fee. The slaves are the IVF embryos who are not perfect to the eyes of the beholder, they are the surplus of an enterprise, a kind of merchandise in storage that needs an exit. They are disposable: they can be put to death for the benefit of another former embryo. They are the slaves of others. And we even have infra-slaves. The same masters may also create human embryos that are mutilated, with genes that have been tampered, altered: chimeras. The direct antithesis of medical sciences: mutilation of human beings at the beginning of their existence.

A policy that allows social inequality is a dubious policy for mankind and society. The United Nations saw it that way and voted strongly to ban any kind of cloning (70% of countries voted against cloning). It is that cloning methodology is against human love (this is better understood after watching the movie *Artificial Intelligence*), that extracting stem cells from an embryo causes the death of a human being; and it is also the bizarre scenario where a person has power over the life of another one. A master can decide over the future of a simple innocent baby girl or baby boy who has existence in a test tube. A master can even have the power to cause a genetic mutilation in another human being to produce a disease or a mutated boy or girl to see how it goes - a kind of Nazi-like experiment.

Do we allow destruction, termination, killing or interruption of human life in its embryonic state? If so, who is allowed to be implanted in the womb? Who do we clone? And who decides who? As Dr. Chia elaborates in his article in the *Strait Times*, *technological determinism is the denial of ethics*. Human life is to be protected and respected. The egg taken from a woman is alive and human, so is the sperm. The resulting IVF embryo is alive and human and when the nucleus of its stem cells is transferred to an enucleated egg the cloned “baby” embryo is alive and human and the first embryo is death. Somatic cell nuclear transfer –the nucleus of an adult cell transferred into an enucleated egg– also results in a human “baby-clone” embryo. The biology facts cannot be denied: the embryo is human because it was human in origin and therefore human since the beginning. This is acknowledged by Singapore's Bioethics Advisory Committee: ***“There is continuous development from independent gametes all the way through to an independent human being. Attempting to define a point at which this new human being begins based on embryology is, the BAC concedes, arbitrary.”*** (Recommendations, Chapter 7, paragraph 16).

Now we should ask ourselves: is it good to destroy human embryos? What if it is for a good cause? The ultimate question is not what a good cause is, but ***who the good cause is***. Well, whoever determines who is allowed to be born may think also that the patient is not qualified to render the destruction of another human being: he is not the good cause. Human life is not relative; it cannot be subordinated to other life: that is the ultimate reason why we do not tolerate slavery. Here the words of Dr. Chia are also consequential, ***“Utilitarian ethics is the inspiration behind many different expressions of eugenics”***. Who is more who?

Clearly, we need to break through the current biological and scientific relativism and realize life is the best good: that is why we cure diseases and protect the defenseless. We can do this with good science, good medicine and good profit. Current clinical experience employs your own adult stem cells from a variety of tissues: nose, fat, bone marrow, skeletal muscle, etc. They proliferate and show plasticity as scientists have reported in *Nature* and *Nature Medicine*. The main rationale to use your own cells is to avoid rejection and to prevent cancer development derived from the ESC (reported also in *Nature Medicine*, *Nature Biotechnology*,

and Cancer).

There is great hope for patients and scientists if they stop seeing themselves as martyrs, the misunderstood persons put in the fry to die because of the intolerance of others: the modern martyr, a victim of intolerance; a false martyrdom. Patients are given false hopes with ESC based therapy. Scientists compromise violating their biology-based-ethics to destroy human life to benefit others.

Life sciences and regenerative medicine will be in the right direction if it respects the most basic human good: human life. These upright scientists can bring real hope to patients. The scientific community and peoples can also capitalize on the benefits coming from adult stem cell based therapy. Israel, Thailand, Australia, US, etc are doing it: scientists have set up companies, research centers, etc. Patients flight in, stay in and flight out. Patients also bring their families, stay in a hotel, etc, an indirect gain for that community.

However, some countries may have moved too slow, wanting to make palatable the dislike of the unnecessary destruction of human embryos risking missing the train of umbilical-cord blood and adult stem cell therapies.

Looking at the strong scientific outlook fostered by several Government Agencies, Singapore can be the center of excellence for adult stem cell based treatments bringing cures –and revenue– to a society that allows neither masters, slaves or martyrs. Science must re-focus its aim to uphold human life as a non-negotiable human good. It is a necessary policy.

The challenge is here. Pasteur, Fleming or Lejeune became great because they cured people. Today's scientists can too be great without devaluating human life, without destroying embryos, without exploiting the weakest. They can cure, save and always confort the sick.

POSTED BY I. SEGARRA AT 3:03 PM

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