

manized and massively coercive, dystopia of Huxley's brilliant imagination. Scientists and biotech industry executives now talk freely, if usually behind closed doors, of what Leon Kass has called the "immortality project." Here, they confidently tell us, is a possible future world without suffering, even without death—except perhaps death freely chosen as a remedy for terminal boredom. But as Huxley presciently discerned decades before the unravelling of the DNA double-helix, such a world would ultimately be an inhuman world: a world of souls without longing, without passion, without striving, without surprise, without desire—in a word, a world without love.

..As one of the World Controllers muses in Huxley's novel, once you began admitting explanations in terms of purpose—well, you didn't know what the results would be. It was the sort of idea that might easily decondition some of the more unsettled minds among the higher castes—make them . . . take to believing . . . that the goal was somewhere beyond, somewhere outside the present human sphere; that the purpose of life was not the maintenance of well-being, but some intensification and refinement of consciousness, some enlargement of knowledge. Which was, the Controller reflected, quite possibly true. But not, in the present circumstances, admissible.

.....Tyranny thrives in a world in which means always trump ends. The freedom of indifference cannot sustain a truly free society.

The national debate over cloning and embryonic stem cell research.... the first great public debate of the biotech era was conducted in almost exclusively utilitarian terms (when it was not reduced to appeals to "compassion" that did not constitute anything resembling a serious argument). What can be done to put this urgent and unavoidable debate onto more secure moral-philosophical ground? I suggest that it will require a rigorous reckoning with the degree to which the freedom of indifference has become the operative notion of freedom in much of our high culture, in the media, among many political leaders, in considerable parts of the mainline Protestant religious community, in the sciences, and in the biotech industry. Challenging the freedom of indifference with freedom for excellence is essential if we are to deploy our new genetic knowledge in ways that lead to human flourishing rather than to the soulless dystopia of the brave new world.

George Weigel

Questions for reflection

1. What important concerns does George Weigel raise re the debate on stem cell research?
2. What do you think Weigel means by "the freedom of indifference"?
3. How can we avoid rushing into a Brave New World, or is it already too late?

The best bioethicists that money can buy

.....Some years ago I was on a panel at the big annual economic conference in Davos, Switzerland. Also on the panel was Nobel Laureate James Watson, then head of the Human Genome Project. I and a few others—well, I think it was one other—were pressing moral questions about the technological manipulation of human nature. Dr. Watson—who seems not only to subscribe to but to devoutly celebrate what Jacques Ellul called the Technological Imperative—explained that nobody should worry about the morality of what they were doing since the project had allocated millions of additional dollars "to get the best ethicists that money can buy."

A number of publications have in recent months raised sharp questions about the biotech industry and its connections with the sub-industry of bioethics. For the most part, bioethicists are in the business of issuing permission slips for whatever the technicians want to do. After

all, they are in their pay.

U.S. News & World Report says that the biomedical industry is pouring millions into bioethics centers, and rewarding academic bioethicists with stock options worth many thousands of dollars. The same ethicists are quoted daily in the media, testify in Congress, and generally assure the public that there's nothing to worry about so long as scientific innovations are accompanied by appropriate expressions of concern by professional handwringers.

....Daniel Callahan is co-founder of the Hastings Center, an institution that laid the groundwork for bioethics back in the sixties. "this is a semi-scamandalous situation for my field," he says. "These companies are smart enough to know that there are a variety of views on these subjects, and with a little bit of asking or shopping around you can find a group that will be congenial to what you are doing."

Minnesota's Carl Elliott says the big danger is not that bioethicists get rich from companies but that they are, whether they know it or not, used. "Bioethics boards look like watchdogs," he says, "but they are used like show dogs."

Nigel Cameron, a bioethicist working with Charles Colson's Wilberforce Forum, notes that bioethics is not what one would ordinarily call a discipline or profession. "Most bioethicists don't train in bioethics. They move sideways from other disciplines—law, theology, medicine, philosophy." The field is "perfectly designed to be the mid-wife for the birth of a whole posthuman future.....From a Christian or traditional perspective, bioethics....isn't ethics at all, but uses items from the ethics toolbox so it can do what it wants in any situation."

Certainly biomedicine and biotechnology call for the most careful moral scrutiny. But whose scrutiny is to be trusted? Nobody comes to these questions, or any questions of importance, with a value-free or value-neutral perspective. But some are free of clear conflicts of interest, unlike the ethical pipers who sing the tunes of the companies that pay them. Their promiscuously issued permission slips would license almost anything, and the slips are typically accompanied by promissory notes that this innovation or that will lead to a cure for everything from Alzheimer's and cancer to the heartbreak of psoriasis.

Never mind that extravagant promissory notes have been issued for decades and are almost never redeemed. Those at the cutting edge assure us that the decisive breakthrough is just on the other side of the line that it was previously forbidden to cross. The biotech industry is driven by scientific curiosity, no doubt, but most importantly by the prospect of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. How many people of great means would be willing to pay how much for an extra ten, twenty, maybe fifty years of life? How much for the promise of immortality? And what moral lines would they, and those who make such promises, not be prepared to cross?

In real ethics, there are some things that must never be done. Bioethics is "procedural." Where it can, it leaps ahead, and where it cannot, it inches ahead, enticed onward by the question, Why not? If it can be done it should be done, or in any event it will be done, and, if it will be done, why not by us rather than by the competition? This is ethical reasoning of a very low order.

John Neuhas

First Things March, 2002

Questions for reflection

1. What serious concerns does the writer raise about the biotech industry?
2. Are his points valid? Consider the manner in which the CIHR has acted in Canada.
3. Is Neuhas being cynical or expressing a very healthy skepticism regarding bioethics?
4. Should we ask bioethicists that simple question:"What's in it for you?"

The Interim PLUS

The lead article in the April edition of *The Interim* tackles the increasingly hot issue of stem cell research. As expected, developments in the field come fast and furious and threaten to overwhelm the ability of society, through its elected representatives, to cope with the rapid advances.

Embryos okayed as research fodder

On March 5, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research announced guidelines for funding of stem cell research, including rules permitting destructive experimentation on human embryos. The move raises concerns that the federally funded body is doing an end-run around Parliament, which was expected to introduce legislation later this year.

Under the guidelines, announced by CIHR president Alan Bernstein, research on embryos left-over from fertility treatments is permitted, with consent of the parents. The embryos cannot be more than 14 days old. The CIHR will establish a Stem Cell Oversight Committee to review funding decisions. Furthermore, the guidelines do not permit funding for human cloning, including cloning for research or so-called therapeutic cloning.

Before the announcement, pro-life Liberal MP Paul Szabo (Mississauga South) asked a rhetorical question during an interview with *The Interim*: what happens when scientists come close to what they believe is a successful treatment but the number of surplus embryos have dwindled to near zero? "Once you open the box to such research, how do you say no?"

Dr. Will Johnston, president of Canadian Physicians for Life, agrees. He said it was fallacious to think that using "surplus" embryos, as long as new human embryos are not created for the purpose of experimentation, is some sort of compromise. "It is naive to assume that 'surplus' embryos will not be created with experimentation purposes in mind. The embryo researchers and fertility doctors must, of necessity, work hand in hand." He added that there will be a perverse "incentive to create surplus embryos when fertility clinics will be the only source for these commodified human beings."

Johnston also criticized the 14-day rule, calling it "arbitrary." He explained, "There is no logical reason or historic precedent why this restraint should be expected to hold, even if it were built on firmer foundations. No distinct biological marker supports the creation of a 14-day limit for permitting the destruction of a unique human being."

Szabo, who recently penned the book *The Ethics and Science of Stem Cells*, called for a ban on embryonic stem-cell research, arguing adult stem cells may be superior for medical treatments. He says research that requires embryos to be destroyed is morally wrong because it involves the deliberate ending of human life.

Campaign Life Coalition, Canada's national political pro-life organization, condemned the guidelines as "inhumane and presumptuous."

The Catholic Organization for Life and Family, a joint effort of Canada's Catholic bishops and the Knights of Columbus, registered its outrage. Jennifer Leddy, co-director of COLF, said, "The embryo should be treated as a human subject not as a research object." She added that while she "can empathize with the hope of those who are looking for a cure for degenerative diseases, this cure cannot be at the expense of another human life, however small, however fragile or invisible to the naked eye."

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, which represents about half of the three million evangelical Protestants in Canada, said it was

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"deeply disappointed with the decision ... to proceed down the morally controversial route of providing public funding for embryonic stem cell research ... that deliberately causes the death of the embryo."

For their part, the CIHR claimed it was not making a moral decision but a scientific one. Ethicist Francoise Baylis said at the press conference that while some people consider the embryo "a person with full moral status," and others view it as "just a collection of cells," the guidelines were decided without addressing the issue of the moral status of the embryo.

But aside from what should be the clear immorality of destroying one set of human beings for the benefit of another, the announcement has worried several quarters as to the lack of democracy in the decision.

The EFC criticized the timing of the announcement. Considering the government has indicated it would act on the committee's report later this spring, an EFC spokesman wondered, "Why did the CIHR choose to move now before a full regulatory structure is in place?" The spokesman noted it, "has pre-empted the federal government and will begin to fund controversial research in a regulatory vacuum."

Mary Ellen Douglas, national organizer of CLC, told *The Interim*, "The CIHR is a body of the federal government, funded by taxpayers' money and it knew the legislation was coming in two months, yet it went ahead anyway and set up its own rules for embryonic research."

She also complained that the announcement came one week before Parliament reconvened, which gave the appearance the funding body was purposely avoiding or trying to minimize public scrutiny of its decision.

Merrifield (Canadian Alliance MP) said as a result of the CIHR announcement, Canadian law now recognizes the legitimacy of embryonic stem cell research. "Because we have a federal agency, using federal dollars, doling out cash and setting guidelines, in the policy vacuum created by this Liberal government, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research is creating Canadian law."

CIHR distributes 560 million taxpayer dollars annually. As Douglas noted, "That's a lot of money they are controlling without benefit of Parliamentary control." Douglas said to allow the CIHR guidelines to become law by default is undemocratic. "The CIHR was pushing the government to draft legislation and they couldn't wait for the government to submit legislation. So we have an unelected body setting the law."

Having solicited opinion from experts last fall, the committee issued its report in December. Bernstein claims his body's guidelines are similar to the recommendations of the committee – a claim repeated by the federal Health Minister Anne McLellan. But Merrifield begs to differ. He noted that the CIHR has no control over how such research is done and that embryos can be the source of first recourse to gather stem cells. The committee, on the other hand, allowed embryonic stem cell research only when all other ethical alternatives had been exhausted and if the scientist was granted a licence by the minister of health.

McLellan seems ready to ignore the recommendations of the committee as she praised the CIHR guidelines allowing taxpayer funding for destructive research on human embryos.

She said, "Much of that which you find in the guidelines will in some fashion be reflected in legislation ultimately passed by this government."

Merrifield said McLellan knows the committee's recommendations on ESCR and the guidelines are incongruent, leading him to believe the minister wanted less stringent regulations than the committee suggested. He urged the government to stop the CIHR and to allow a full public debate on the issue. "Canadians have not had the opportunity to raise their concerns about this."

Douglas reminds pro-lifers that whatever the process that led to the decision, the “most important issue is that human beings can be killed for experimentation. It’s an abomination.” She compared the scientists clamouring for funding to the Nazi doctors who said “they (the Jews) were going to be killed anyway so why don’t we use them. The killing of human beings for the purpose of scientific research was condemned at Nuremberg.”

Douglas urged pro-life Canadians – and anyone else worried about the surrender of the democratic decision-making process to rogue bodies – to write to their MPs, and send the same letters to McLellan and newspapers. “In your own hand-writing, tell them ‘you can’t kill human beings for experiments,’” she said. “We need a groundswell of opposition to this.”

By Paul Tuns
The Interim

Questions for reflection

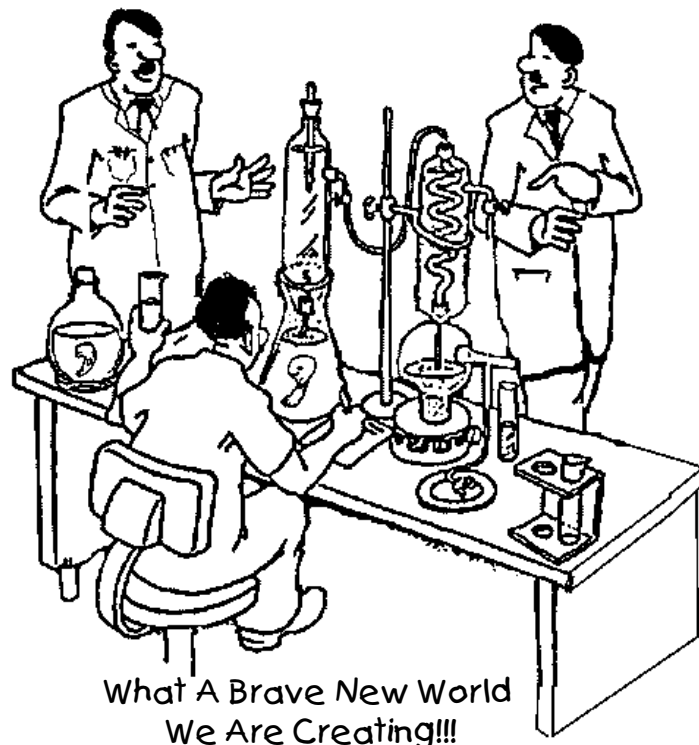
1. According to Paul Tuns what are three problems with the actions of the CIHR?
2. Briefly summarize the main objections raised by the following opponents of the permissive guidelines announced by the CIHR re stem cell research:
(a) elected politicians (b) Dr. Will Johnston (c) Catholic Organization for Life and Family (d) The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (e) Mary Ellen Douglas.
3. How did spokespersons for the CIHR justify their actions?

Your help needed to stem embryo destruction

The announcement that the Canadian Institutes for Health Research will fund embryonic stem cell research is bad enough, because such experimentation depends upon the destruction of tiny human beings at their earliest stage of development. There can be no forgetting this abomination.

But the problem is made worse when an agency of the federal government, run by unelected bureaucrats, makes laws on vital life issues because of a public policy vacuum the federal government allows to develop.

For years, the federal government has dragged its feet in this area.



Legislation on reproductive and experimental technologies that was being prepared in 1997, died when the prime minister called an early election. The legislation would have reflected the work of a royal commission set up earlier in the decade. It took another four years for the government to introduce draft legislation that the standing health committee of the House of Commons studied until December 2001.

Both Health Minister Anne McLellan and her predecessor, Allan Rock, promised legislation sometime in 2002. And while the government waited (and waited and waited), science went on in a policy vacuum. The CIHR, pressured by scientists, acted.

Now is the time for Parliament to act. Parliamentarians must reassert their authority to enact law, and not allow their powers to be usurped by funding agencies and other unelected bodies such as the CIHR. They must take a stand and urge the government to rein in the CIHR by making it clear that it must not set guidelines for such research unilaterally. MPs must also call for protection of all human beings from the moment of fertilization/conception, and demand that human embryos have the right not to become fodder for the experiments of mad scientists.

Better yet, the health minister should show decisive leadership and introduce legislation immediately that will protect human embryos from destructive experimentation.

We urge MPs and the government to do what’s right. And your help is needed. Contact your MP and Health Minister Anne McLellan with your concerns and urge them to ban embryonic stem cell research.

You can write to your MP and Anne McLellan postage free at: House of Commons, Ottawa, K1A 0A3. If you can, request a personal visit with you MP.

Interim editorial

Questions for reflection

1. What are the problematic aspects of the CIHR stem cell research guidelines as outlined in *The Interim* editorial?
2. In the editorial cartoon also found on page 4 of the April *Interim* (See left of this page) what connection is made between some modern lab scientists and past efforts to create a “brave new world”? Do you agree?
3. Shouldn’t Parliament make the policy decisions instead of CIHR? Why or why not?

University symposium looks at stem cells

On Feb. 1, York University’s Bethune College held a Stem Cell Symposium, attended by about 200 students and a smattering of professors. The science of stem cells was presented with clarity as the six-member panel examined this exciting new ground of regenerative medicine. But despite giving lip service to the ethics of using stem cells derived from human embryos, only one speaker came out against the practise.

Following five speakers who focused on the science, Dr. Bridget Campion, a professor of ethics at St. Augustine seminary, provided a view of life that does not accept embryos as fodder for scientific research. She said human life was cyclical, that it begins and ends in the same place, a place of innocence, where the need for others’ love and care is vital for survival. There is no time when the human person is not in this cycle of life, whether he is in the embryonic stage or the final stages of old age. Society, however, tends to think of life in terms of what she called “the alpine view of humanity.” The alpine view judges a person’s worth depending on how high up she is on the “mountain of life.”

The other five speakers seemed to hold such views.

Dr. Janet Rossart from the University of Toronto gave a straightforward presentation on the science of stem cells, and while she admitted that embryonic stem cell research has serious ethical questions, she did

not address them. She did, however, come out against the use of cloned human beings as a source of embryonic stem cells, but weakened her position by supporting mere regulation of the practise through licensing restrictions and not a ban with the force of criminal law behind it. She said there should be flexibility in this matter in case society was to change its views on human cloning.

Mary Jardine, national director of the Parkinson’s Society, endorsed embryonic stem cell research and supported the federal government’s draft legislation which allows for the use of human embryos in medical research for up to 14 days, (employing, essentially, an ends-justifies-the-means argument.)

Dr. John Dick of the Hospital for Sick Children, University of Toronto, warned that after years of failing to replicate the success of his stem cell research in mice in human trials, science still has a long way to go. He said the media hype surrounding stem cell research seems to promise cures that do not yet exist.

Derek Van Der Kooy of the department of Medical Biophysics, University of Toronto, researches stem cells in the human eye. He said even adult or somatic stem cell research raises ethical issues. His research indicates the importance of controlled experiments – he found eye stem cells grow only when isolated – and warned of stem cells that mutate in unexpected and potentially harmful ways.

Liora Salter from Osgoode Hall Law School at York University described her theory of the life cycle of a public debate. Salter said the best time to make public policy decisions is in the first and second stages of a public debate when the issue is still relatively undefined, unclear and complex, and when the issue is still in the hands of intellectuals. By the third stage sides start to form, the vocabulary of the debate is established and people “get clumped together on one side or the other.” Stage four, according to Salter, is the impoverished state of the debate when issues are based on belief, and the sides are so oversimplified that there is no reason to adhere to them other than belief. She says there is no resolution to this kind of debate and identified abortion is an example of a stage four debate. She seemed to miss the fact that though science and ethics are complex, complexity is not synonymous with ambiguity. Science and ethics can at once be very complex and very clear. Her line of reasoning was essentially a kind of moral relativism dressed up in sheep’s clothing.....Unfortunately, science appears to have taken the embryo to a place where it is not recognized for what it is – a member of the human species. Instead, it is looked at under a microscope in a laboratory and seen as a means to satiate the hunger for scientific “progress.”

By Natalie Hudson
The Interim

Natalie Hudson is the executive director of the Right to Life Association of Toronto and Area. A longer version of this article appears in the organization’s February 2002 newsletter.

Questions for reflection

1. According to Hudson what were the main views presented at York University’s Stem Cell Symposium?
2. What did she find “flawed” about the stem cell discussions?
3. How can young people demonstrate their concern with government plans or lack of plans to regulate stem cell research?

Ethics under the microscope

...For the 10 experts in that (Ottawa) boardroom, stem cells represented an ethical minefield, – a cauldron of bubbling scientific controversies and a major test of whether Canadians will control the biotechnology revolution or be controlled by it.

It was the CIHR that selected the 10 experts and handed them that sack of hot potatoes. But the agency also gave them an advance okay to sidestep what most Canadians consider the hottest issue of them all —

where stem cells come from.

Right now, stem-cell research includes what some consider a Faustian bargain, a pact to eventually deliver our souls to the Devil. That’s because the most medically promising stem cells are found, so far, mainly in human embryos and fetuses.

These particular stem cells seem to be immortal. They keep reproducing indefinitely in a laboratory dish, unlike ordinary human tissue cells that quickly die off.

Yet extracting these “mother” cells destroys the embryo. To some people, this is as morally unacceptable as abortion, since they consider an embryo to be a person. To others, causing the destruction of an embryo isn’t the same as killing a person and is justified by the immense potential to relieve human suffering..... the researchers were also obviously anxious to get going. Canadians have been leaders in using embryonic stem cells in other animals especially mice, to develop new techniques to investigate the genetic aspects of disease and test potential therapies.

Some people who oppose the use of embryos and fetuses on ethical grounds are touting heavily another approach—finding stem cells in adult tissues that have the same changeling ability as the embryonic stem cells.

Isolated scientists support such claims, but the leading researchers in the field mostly agree that the few experiments reported so far with the adult stem cells, including work at McGill University, fall far short of making the case.

And while much is contentious in the area of stem cell research law professor Caulfield expresses a view that seems to be universally agreed.

“This issue is never going to end,” he says. “We are always going to have continuing talk, continuing schemes. This is the dawn of the biotech century.”

By Peter Calamai
Toronto Star, March 13, 2002

Questions for reflection

1. How did stem cells represent an ethical minefield for the 10 members of the CIHR?
2. Who sat on the CIHR panel? Who chose these panelists? On what basis were they chosen? Research the background of these panelists.
3. What is the Canadian Institutes of Health Research?
4. Why could one say that the CIHR chosen panel of experts “had to come up with guidelines which permit” rather than prohibit embryonic stem cell research?
5. Does the reporter appear to virtually dismiss the alternative—namely, adult stem cells—which present no ethical or moral dilemmas?

A better concept of freedom

... this tale of two monks (St. Thomas Aquinas and William of Ockham) also sheds light on grave public issues today. And in doing so, it reminds us that a “clash of civilizations” is being played out within our own society, as well as between ourselves and hostile forces bent on our destruction.

.....we have been reminded of the fact that democracy is always an unfinished experiment, testing the capacity of each generation to live freedom nobly.

The first reminder came in the aftermath of dramatic advances in genetics, including the decryption of the human genome, and the biotechnologies this new knowledge rapidly spawned. Suddenly, Francis Fukuyama’s image of the “end of history” seemed overrun by Aldous Huxley’s “brave new world.” Human beings, it became clear, would soon have the capacity to remanufacture the human condition—precisely by manufacturing or remanufacturing human beings. The new tyranny on the horizon was not the jackbooted totalitarian state of Orwell’s 1984[but] rather, the new and ominous possibility on the near-term horizon was something quite different: the happy, if thoroughly, dehu-