Meet Center Fellows

Frances J. Beckwith, Ph.D.
Dr. Beckwith is currently Associate Professor of Philosophy, Culture, and Law at Trinity Graduate School. He is also a member of the adjunct faculty at Trinity Law School (Santa Ana, CA) and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL). He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Fordham University. In addition to serving on the North American editorial board of the Center’s journal Ethics & Medicine, Dr. Beckwith is a general editor of the Center’s new book series Critical Issues in Bioethics. He has published numerous essays, articles, and reviews in various journals and has authored and edited many books including Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air (Baker 1998), and The Abortion Controversy: 25 Years After Roe v. Wade (2nd ed., Wadsworth 1990).

Daniel P. O'Mahoney, Ph.D.
Dr. O'Mahoney is currently Professor of Bioethics and Bioengineering at Law at Carmel College of Nursing in Columbus, Ohio. He received his Ph.D. in medicinal chemistry from Ohio State University. He has published widely in the fields of chemistry and bioethics, with a special emphasis on alternative medicine. Dr. O'Mahoney is a co-author of the first volume of the Center’s Bioethics series and also a regular contributor to the Center’s Horizons in Bioethics book series. In addition to being a member of the Mount Carmel Medical Center Institutional Review Board, he is on the Board of Governors of the Ohio Council Against Health Fraud and facilitates discussions on bioethics and alternative medicine as part of his church’s outreach ministry.

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Late last year, scientists in the U.S. succeeded in isolating and culturing stem cells from a variety of sources—embryos, aborted fetuses, and adults. Stem cells, which are the precursor cells that give rise to the 210 different kinds of tissue in the human body, are believed to have the potential to treat a host of diseases including Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, diabetes, and cancer.

This astounding achievement comes not only by calling upon the government to fund research on those cells but also to carry the most promising for treating the largest array of diseases—those obtained from human embryos. Because obtaining those cells necessitates the destruction of the embryo, debate, began brewing in both in the U.S. Congress and in U.S. President Clinton’s National Bioethics Advisory Commission regarding the ethical and legal issues involved in such research.

The Center, in conjunction with several organizations and individuals, put together a statement on the issue and released it on July 11 in a Capitol Hill press conference with Senator Brownback of Kansas. The statement, authored by experts in law, science, and ethics, opposed federal funding of such research by outlining the legal and ethical reasons why it is problematic, while asserting that adult stem cells and other methods of restoring diseased or dysfunctional tissue may actually hold more promise for treatment. Congressional packets which included a copy of the statement, a list of professionals from around the country who signed onto the statement, and relevant scientific articles were distributed to the office of every U.S. Senator and Representative.

There is an existing ban on the use of federal funds for destructive human embryo research. However, the National Institutes of Health and some other advocates of embryonic stem cell research have argued that the ban does not apply to research on stem cells since these cells are not embryos. This was disputed earlier this year by 70 Congressmen and 7 Senators who indicated in a letter to the Department of Health and Human Services that this is an illegitimate reinterpretation of the law. Earlier this fall, the National Bioethics Advisory Commission recommended to the President that researchers be allowed to use federal funds to do research on human embryos, even research that destroys those embryos. Senate majority leader Trent Lott has promised extensive hearings this winter with a vote on the issue of human embryonic stem cell research by February.

Since the release of the Center’s statement, a new coalition has formed to educate people about this issue and to communicate relevant concerns to Congress. The coalition, called Do No Harm: A Coalition of Americans for Research Ethics, has a web site with up-to-date information on the issue and an opportunity to sign up and be a part of the effort. That web address is www.stemcellresearch.org.

In addition, people can contact Senators and Representatives and indicate their support for federally funding adult stem cell research while opposing the funding of embryonic stem cell research. The Capitol Hill switchboard number is 202-224-3121. (See article on embryo adoption for another constructive alternative.)

The Human Embryo: Too Little to Care Much About?

R. Martin Palmer, J.D., Attorney at Law (Maryland); Attorney in the Davis v. Davis Case

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