News from the Field

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UK Denies Permission to Create "Designer" Baby

The UK's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) has denied a request to practically screen three embryos, in a move of avoiding the likelihood that a child able to donate live tissue to their seriously ill twin brother. The child could then be treated medically and surgically (the twin already died from a perfectly matched donor). The HFEA argued that such screening is "unnecessary and unethical" because screening technology to the UK is only allowed in conjunction with testing to ensure the embryo does not have a genetic disease. The couple was suffering from Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a disease that is not inherited and therefore would not affect future children and for which screening tests are not available. In 2001, the HFEA allowed several couples to genetically screen embryos for Duchenne muscular dystrophy, but that was not enough for sufferers "a likelihood that is reduced," she said. The debate now is whether the HFEA has too much power to make these kind of decisions and whether Parliament should be making these decisions. The HFEA is a body of appointed officials with no judicial accountability for these decisions.

Swiss City Pivoted to Become Assisted Suicide Capital

Suisse is becoming known as the Swiss version of the United States, known for its high suicide rate. The country's population is decreasing because of the young people's lack of interest in the country. As a result, the country is pivoting to become a capital of assisted suicide. The country is trying to make assisted suicide legal and to become a leading country in this field. However, many opponents are concerned about the impact of this decision on the country's global image and the impact on the country's economy.

A Review of the Book

The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy


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The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy contains twenty articles addressing this highly controversial area of research. Part I reviews the science behind stem cell research, as well as the political context underwriting the 1999 National Bioethics Advisory Commission (NBAC) report on the topic. Two of the book's editors also share personal insights gained from their experience as ethics consultants at Geron, a leading biotechnology company engaged in this research.

Part II addresses the political issues underlying the NBAC report. Three articles evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the report, concluding that its central point of contention concerns the human embryo's moral status. The editors express their dismay at how poorly NBAC justified its conclusion that human embryos may be destroyed in research. Somehow Holland also addresses stem cell research from a feminist perspective. While making some questionable claims, she raises important issues about justice and the impact this research has on women.

Part III contains eight articles addressing from various religious perspectives the ethical issues raised by induced embryonic stem cell research. Somewhat surprisingly, only Gillet Meilans's article opposes research. Ted Peters argues arguments made by The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity in conjunction with the organization's Dr. NV does not. He incorrectly claims that these two organizations view stem cells themselves as potential persons and then proceeds to define this group of persons by offering a view of personhood as something that has "depended on being called by a future parental relationship." Karen Lebacqz mentions various instances in which we respect things we kill (e.g., animals in selective breeding) and concludes that human embryos can therefore be destroyed in respectful ways. However, she fails to sustain her argument for the issue at hand.

Part IV contains five articles on public policy that, taken together, make this book worth reading. Paul Root Wolpe and Glenn McGee critique the role bioethicists have had in policy-making. They conclude that this role is far from ideal. Further, bioethicists often have a different understanding of the field, the ethical issues that need to be considered, and the political context in which they should be considered. The fourth article is by Laurie Zoloth's "justicemaking" as a philosopher on the Geron Ethics Advisory Board. She connects the idea of her and her colleagues were "ethics disaster" by the scientists, "the thinking always one step behind the latest technological development.

Zoloth concludes the book with a striking word-picture. When driving to Geron's beautiful headquarters, she sometimes maximum her turn and ended up in a neighborhood where the future is "far more bleak." Next to the riches of Geron lay utter poverty, where houses, churches, and even health clinics are dilapidated and under-funded. It is this reviewer's belief that apart from the absolute ethical standard prohibiting the destruction of human embryos, the commitment to justice calls for a broader examination of the drive for high-tech medicine when so many do not have access to any health care. Further examination of how justice should be served is greatly needed, and this book provides some good starting points.