

The Pro-Death Lobby

In his [address to the nation on stem-cell research](#), President Bush acknowledged that research in such fields as human cloning and embryonic stem cells has the potential to save lives, but, as he explained:

I strongly oppose human cloning, as do most Americans. We recoil at the idea of growing human beings for spare body parts, or creating life for our convenience. And while we must devote enormous energy to conquering disease, it is equally important that we pay attention to the moral concerns raised by the new frontier of human embryo stem cell research. Even the most noble ends do not justify any means.

My position on these issues is shaped by deeply held beliefs. I'm a strong supporter of science and technology, and believe they have the potential for incredible good -- to improve lives, to save life, to conquer disease. Research offers hope that millions of our loved ones may be cured of a disease and rid of their suffering. I have friends whose children suffer from juvenile diabetes. Nancy Reagan has written me about President Reagan's struggle with Alzheimer's. My own family has confronted the tragedy of childhood leukemia. And, like all Americans, I have great hope for cures.

I also believe human life is a sacred gift from our Creator. I worry about a culture that devalues life, and believe as your President I have an important obligation to foster and encourage respect for life in America and throughout the world.

This implication that supporters of this sort of research – **such as ourselves** – are part of a “culture that devalues [human] life”, is unfair as well as false. In reality, our (Western) culture values human life more than any other that has ever existed. The controversy here is not between those who value life and those who do not, but between rival conceptions of what ought to be thought of as a human being. And while there is room for considerable philosophical disagreement about this issue, no rational person can take the view that a collection of cells without a functioning brain is

human in any moral sense whatsoever.

There *are*, unfortunately, cultures that really do devalue human life. Islamofascism is currently the most important of these. But it is a frightening fact that there is also an authentically Western cult of death that currently enjoys enormous support (including, ironically, from the very tradition to which President Bush belongs, and from which he bases his opposition to certain types of scientific research). Check [this](#) out (via [InstaPundit](#)):

it's a great shame that the field once known as medical ethics has degenerated into a coven of high profile bioethicists set on finding the best way to prevent new medicines from saving lives

Hyperbole, perhaps. But the underlying point is true: there is widespread, principled opposition to scientific research intended to defeat, or even significantly to postpone, ageing and death.

Mon, 06/14/2004 - 15:20 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Again with this..?

This implication that supporters of this sort of research – such as ourselves – are part of a "culture that devalues [human] life", is unfair as well as false.

Don't think he implied that. He said he "worries" about such a culture. Should he not?

The controversy here is not between those who value life and those who do not, but between rival conceptions of what ought to be thought of as a human being.

I thought the controversy here was whether research involving the use of certain types of cells ought to be funded by public monies. You seem more concerned with this "ought to be thought of as a human being" thing; embryonic stem cell research (from other than existing lines) per se is almost an afterthought here. Is the reason that the funding decision bothers you so much, simply because you don't want Bush's underlying idea that the embryo ought to be thought of as a human being to stand?

If so, why not make that argument by itself?

What if embryonic stem-cell research proves to be a big flop? Would you be forced to admit that Bush was "right"? Of course you would not do so. So why not decouple the two issues "embryo=human" and "stem-cell research should be funded" to make it more clear that it's the former that really concerns you? Is it because you think that dangling "Alzheimer's cure" in front of peoples' faces will more easily sway them to your side?

And while there is room for considerable philosophical disagreement about this issue, no rational person can take the view that a

collection of cells without a functioning brain is human in any moral

sense whatsoever.

Not in *any* moral sense whatsoever? Can't a rational person (not Bush) think it's (in whatever sense) .0001% human or whatever? Why such binary thinking here? Doesn't make rational sense to me. But perhaps I'm not rational, you'll have to tell me. By the way when does the binary switch occur?

But it is a frightening fact that there is also an authentically Western cult of death that currently enjoys enormous support (including, ironically, from the very tradition to which President Bush belongs, and from which he bases his opposition to certain types of scientific research).

Good thing you phrased that so carefully.

Bush says he "worries" about a culture of death and that's unfair and false. Yet here you (in a slippery, weasel-worded way...) place Bush *in* (oh yes I see merely "supported" by) a "cult" of death...

Ohhh-kay.

I'm still astonished how many people can become utterly convinced almost to the point of obsession of the urgent necessity of the US government (whether or not that's even *their* government...) to federally-fund some research they evidently know very little about... apparently all that's required is for a "Religious" person to oppose it.

On a positive note this does call to mind some potential reverse-psychology strategies for Bush, if only he were clever enough to employ them.... ;-)

by a reader on Mon, 06/14/2004 - 19:14 | [reply](#)

Public funding

Democracy is publically funded - should it be immoral to demand democracy? Certain areas of science are global and generic - they cannot be funded privately at all. Even big companies (biotechnological companies in this case) invest money only in specific research - a concrete drug or a concrete disease treatment. They do invest something in general research but to a very limited extend. Millions (if not billions) of public dollars had been invested in quantum physics research before a few private companies have attracted a couple of millions into the creation of first quantum computer. But it wouldn't be possible without public money at all. And it holds for almost all general research areas whether it is in biology or in physics or anywhere else. And deciding whether to give public money for a certain area or not is a way of allowing/disallowing a whole are of research. Bush's way of disallowing or discouraging stem cell research will cost lives in any way you look at it. If it provides a direct method of treating cancer, Alzheimer's disease etc. - that is one. If it doesn't - an enourmous amount of scientific data will be passes to researchers anyway.

And it might be not an "urgent necessity of the US government to

federally-fund some research we know very little about". But it is important to show scientists that governor who know very little about their science wouldn't interfere on the basis of their irrational political ideology but rather choose another target. For example, falling educational standards all over the country.

But yeh, I hear the libertarian outcry - if you don't like state school then go private. However, the less people are educated en mass the more support Bush's opinion has.

by a reader on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 08:52 | [reply](#)

Science funding

Even big companies (biotechnological companies in this case) invest money only in specific research - a concrete drug or a concrete disease treatment

This isn't true. Research and development companies import most of their know-how from other RND companies with similar interests. In order to do this they have to attract scientists. This is because expired patents are hard to exploit, technical papers are difficult to read, conference gossip is valuable and elusive, and so on. The way you attract high-calibre scientists is by giving them considerable freedom to pursue whatever takes their fancy, including pure research. Otherwise they'll either be poor scientists or not interested in working for you.

Terence Kealey of Buckingham University, England, has analysed the history and economics of science funding. He has shown that every dollar of public funding displaces more than a dollar of private funding.

Government funding of science did not get going until the world wars. I hope we can agree that plenty of scientific progress had been made up till that point in history.

It's consistent to understand all this and to condemn President Bush's opposition to research which makes use of human embryos. Embryos aren't human beings. Life is valuable. It's perforce impossible to know which areas of research will yield the most fruit. These facts stand regardless of who pays your salary.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 10:54 | [reply](#)

It's Not Just About Funding

The President of the United States is using his bully pulpit to characterize certain lines of research as immoral because of their use of human embryos. This is not a fiscal point; it's a moral and cultural point.

This president has created a Council on Bioethics **led by** and **stacked with** people with well-known positions against many forms

of artificially influencing biological processes, for reasons that

appear to many of us to be mystical nonsense.

Ideas have consequences, and these are bad ideas that have the president's support.

I applaud **The World** for pointing this out.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 15:50 | [reply](#)

careful w/ the quotes

gil,

did Bush actually say doing it is immoral somewhere? I missed that bit.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 16:06 | [reply](#)

Quotes

Elliot,

I don't know if he uses that exact phrase anywhere (and I didn't indicate that it was a quote), but the implication seems pretty clear and I thought it was fair to call it "characterizing...as immoral".

Here are some direct quotes:

Research on embryonic stem cells raises profound ethical questions, because extracting the stem cell destroys the embryo, and thus destroys its potential for life. Like a snowflake, each of these embryos is unique, with the unique genetic potential of an individual human being.

As I thought through this issue, I kept returning to two fundamental questions: First, are these frozen embryos human life, and therefore, something precious to be protected?

...

And while we must devote enormous energy to conquering disease, it is equally important that we pay attention to the moral concerns raised by the new frontier of human embryo stem cell research. Even the most noble ends do not justify any means.

Since he decided against continuing to use these means, it seems clear that he considers them to not be morally justified: immoral.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 16:35 | [reply](#)

what's the real issue then?

Two responses here get to the heart of what bothers me about this criticism.

1. *"And it might be not an "urgent necessity of the US government to federally-fund some research we know very little about". But it is important to show scientists that governor who know very little about their science wouldn't interfere on the basis of their irrational political ideology"*

2. *"It's Not Just About Funding: The President of the United States is using his bully pulpit to characterize certain lines of research as immoral because of their use of human embryos. This is not a fiscal point; it's a moral and cultural point."*

For both people who wrote these statements, the **actual** bee in their bonnet is that President Bush evidently believes embryos have at least some moral status, and they think that belief is wrong, and they don't want that opinion to stand or carry any force. "Stem cell research" as such is neither here nor there for both people who wrote these statements. They could be defending "kwyjibo flibbertigibbit research" for all they care, or know. All they know (were told, read somewhere..) is Scientists Want It and Bush used a Religious reason to oppose it, *and that's enough* to cause a hue and cry.

If it's wrong for President Bush to oppose the US government funding stem cell research for reasons which include irrationalities, is it also wrong for people to be in favor of the US government funding "stem cell research (whatever that is! but scientists want it!)" for reasons which include the aforementioned rationale - and are thus **also** irrational? Let me know, I'm still learning,

--Blix

by a reader on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 18:26 | [reply](#)

Huh?

Blix,

I'm not sure what you're asking. Are you saying "Is it wrong to support US Government funding for stem cell research merely because Scientists Want It and Bush opposed it on religious grounds?"

I think that depends. I don't think it's wrong to insist on scientific criteria to guide these funding decisions rather than mistaken religious criteria.

If by "Scientist Want It" you mean that there is a consensus that the research shows sufficient scientific merit to warrant funding based on historically applied criteria in the absence of an erroneous religion-based intervention, then it isn't wrong.

If by "Scientists Want It" you mean just that some scientists think

its merit is greater than zero but it wouldn't meet the historically applied criteria for funding, think it is wrong.

Of course, the above assumes that US Government funding of this sort of research isn't wrong in general. I think it is wrong.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 19:27 | [reply](#)

Gil, There could (for all

Gil,

There could (for all I know) be a "consensus that the research shows sufficient scientific merit to warrant funding based on historically applied criteria in the absence of an erroneous religion-based intervention" (although I don't know how one ever sets up these controlled conditions, there still seems to be this weird assumption that non-erroneous non-religion-based (or at least, non-irrational) criteria are somehow the norm. I don't buy that).

But a large number of the people currently saying "We [or, 'you Americans', as the case may be, depending on the speaker..] must fund stem-cell research (from embryos (not from existing lines)) NOW!" *don't actually know that*, as far as I can tell. What they "know" is far closer to "some scientists think its merit is greater than zero". More like, "they read in a magazine (or saw on Oprah..) that some scientists think its merit is greater than zero".

This knowledge alone (and not any particular knowledge of this kwyjibo-flibbertigibit research or whatever the heck it is, who cares anyway), combined with the knowledge that George Bush opposes it and is Religious, is quite evidently sufficient grounds to bring the issue to the forefront in some peoples' minds and make it a huge urgent important issue. (Now, this all may not actually apply to **The World's** advocacy in particular, but thus far if Their knowledge of stem-cell research goes much beyond that, it's difficult to tell.)

by a reader on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 19:56 | [reply](#)

ok it wasnt a direct quote but you implied you were paraphrasing

Gil,

the stuff you quote shows that Bush considers it a moral issue. but his decision against funding does not mean he thinks the research is definitely immoral. it could be that he simply is not totally sure, and wants to play it morally safe. if he was sure, wouldn't he try for something stronger like a ban?

(it's not actually playing it morally safe, because his decision hurts real humans, but he doesn't seem to realise that. but that's another issue.)

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 20:32 | [reply](#)

Immoral?

Elliot,

You're right. I implied that I was paraphrasing, because I thought (and still think) that Bush indicated that he thinks it's immoral. I don't think my interpretation is outrageous; and if Bush doesn't think it is immoral, and wants others to know that, he should have communicated better.

Also, I don't think the lack of a ban is a good test for his opinion, because I think he lacks the authority to ban it. I believe that would require an act of congress, and he knows that he wouldn't be able to get it without a politically costly fight (probably not at all).

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 21:17 | [reply](#)

Irrational Support

Blix,

Yes, I agree that those who might strongly support this research funding only because they heard some scientists want to do it and that Bush blocked it for religious reasons are wrong and irrational.

I suspect that **The World** bases their judgment on the accounts of scientists that they have reason to trust that the research is otherwise deserving of funding in the sense that I indicated. So, I don't think that **The World** is wrong or irrational about this. Ultimately all of us, including Bush, must make our decisions based partially on the trusted advice of scientists; we can't be experts in all fields, and many decisions should not be left to those "experts".

Also, something that I think is *not* wrong or irrational is to take no position on whether the funding is warranted, but to criticize Bush's reasoning.

Gil

by **Gil** on Tue, 06/15/2004 - 21:31 | [reply](#)

Therapeutic Cloning

From the **Advanced Cell Technology FAQ**:

Cloning is a process in which a body (somatic) cell is placed into an egg cell from which the DNA has been removed, by a process called nuclear transfer. The egg cell is then activated and starts to develop. The resulting offspring has DNA identical to the animal donating the somatic cell. Cloning is an asexual form of reproduction.

In contrast, sexual reproduction uses a sperm and an egg cell and the resultant offspring has a genetic mix from two animals.

2. How does Reproductive Cloning differ from Therapeutic Cloning?

In Reproductive Cloning, following the nuclear transfer process the egg cell is grown into an embryo and is placed in the uterus of a surrogate mother who will carry the pregnancy to completion as a normal pregnancy. In Therapeutic Cloning, the egg cell is grown only to the blastocyst stage and the inner cell mass is removed from the blastocyst. The stem cells in the inner cell mass are then differentiated into cells that can be used to treat life-threatening diseases. It is important to note that no embryo is either created or destroyed in the Therapeutic Cloning process.

Someone **asked**:

what is wrong with the existing lines of embryonic stem cells, i.e. what research needs cannot be met by them?

For one thing, existing embryonic stem cells aren't genetically identical with the patient and thus there is the problem of rejection. It is not that there will be this research using embryonic cells and then we'll have treatments that don't involve using embryonic cells: therapeutic cloning involves the creation of embryonic cells – though note that we are not talking about a foetus about to be born, just a collection of 100 cells that have been dividing for only about 8 days.

Note also that these cells could become more than one embryo, and two such collections of cells (blastocysts) could become one embryo. These are potential human life, but then, a sperm or an ovum or a skin cell or just about any part of a person has the potential to become a human being.

For more information on this, read some of **these fascinating scientific papers**, **this interview** with therapeutic cloning pioneer, Michael West, and the explanatory articles linked **here**. There is also a very clear explanation of somatic cell nuclear transfer **here**.

Michael West's book about his brave and pioneering work in this field, **The Immortal Cell**, is an absolute classic. Well worth reading.

A question for those who disapprove of therapeutic cloning: Do you disapprove of using bovine egg cells too, or just human ones? Apparently it works using bovine ones, though obviously they would be using the patient's own DNA to create the so-called 'embryo' (all 100 cells of it) so perhaps this idea will have people protesting even more loudly. (And given that a bovine ovum has the potential to become human life – not a hybrid, but 100% human life – I'd be interested to know if all those against harnessing the power of

embryonic stem cells are vegarians.

Here are some advocacy group pages giving useful information:

- **Therapeutic cloning**
- **Why is George W. Bush Trying to Send America's Best Medical Researchers to Jail? What can you do about it?**
- **Stem Cell Action**
- **Texans for Advancement of Medical Research**

I must admit that I am a bit hazy about what the current legal situation is in the USA, but according to **the National Human Genome Research Institute**:

In July 2001, the House of Representatives voted 265 to 162 to make any human cloning a criminal offense, including cloning to create an embryo for derivation of stem cells rather than to produce a child. In August 2002, President Bush, contending with a DHHS decision made during the Clinton administration, stated in a prime-time television address that federal support would be provided for research using a limited number of stem cell colonies already in existence (derived from leftover IVF embryos). Current bills before Congress would ban all forms of cloning outright, prohibit cloning for reproductive purposes, and impose a moratorium on cloning to derive stem cells for research, or prohibit cloning for reproductive purposes while allowing cloning for therapeutic purposes to go forward. As of late June, the Senate has taken no action. President Bush's Bioethics Council is expected to recommend the prohibition of reproductive cloning and a moratorium on therapeutic cloning later this summer.

Prepared by Kathi E. Hanna, M.S., Ph.D., Science and Health Policy Consultant

(March 2004)

In **an editorial** in The New England Journal of Medicine Volume 349:300, July 17, 2003, Number 3, Jeffrey M. Drazen wrote:

The U.S. House of Representatives has voted to ban research on, and the use of, medical treatments derived from embryonic stem cells. This bill is shortsighted and has the potential to put many critical future advances in medicine beyond the reach of patients in the United States.

There are two distinct uses of embryonic stem cells. The first, for which there is no support among members of the scientific and medical communities, is the use of stem cells to create a genetically identical person. There is a de facto worldwide ban on such activities, and this ban is appropriate. The second use is to develop

genetically compatible biomaterials for the replacement of diseased tissues in patients with devastating medical conditions, such as diabetes or Parkinson's disease. This is important work that must and will move forward. [...]

As a physician who has cared for patients who suffered and died from conditions that we are currently unable to treat, I hope that this research can progress rapidly.

--

Sarah Fitz-Claridge

<http://www.fitz-claridge.com/>

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Wed, 06/16/2004 - 17:58 | [reply](#)