Social and Religious Context of Embryonic Stem Cell Research

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Outline for the Talk

The Debate from the Elite Perspective

The Debate from the Average Person’s Perspective

Is there/should there be a link between elites and the masses?
Elite Debate

- Pro ESCR: Medical/Scientific Community, Disease Interest Groups, most Bioethicists

- Anti-ESCR: Fundamentalist, Evangelical and Catholic Leaders
Elite Debate

Pro ESCR: Medical/Scientific Community, Disease Interest Groups, most Bioethicists
-- Why In Favor? Relief of Suffering, Value of Discovery

Anti-ESCR: Fundamentalist, Evangelical and Catholic Leaders
-- Why Opposed? Death of Embryos
Elites In Favor of ECSR

Pro ESCR: Disease Interest Groups

-- Why only Focus on Relief of Suffering?

1) Personal experience with suffering
Elites In Favor of ECSR

Pro ESCR: Medical/Scientific Community

-- Why only Focus on Relief of Suffering?
Elites In Favor of ECSR

Pro ESCR: Medical/Scientific Community

-- Why only Focus on Relief of Suffering?

1) Benefits of consensual goal
Elites In Favor of ECSR

Pro ESCR: Medical/Scientific Community

-- Why only Focus on Relief of Suffering?

1) Benefits of consensual goal
2) Lessons learned from failures to promote other values
The scientists have “a distinctive attitude toward the world,” “a program for utterly transforming it,” an “unshakable,” nay even a “fanatical,” confidence in a “worldview,” a “faith” no less than a “program” for the reconstruction of mankind.
These expressions rather exactly describe a religious cult, if there ever was one -- a cult of men-gods, however otherwise humble. These are not the findings, or the projections, of an exact science as such, but a religious view of where and how ultimate human significance is to be found.
Elites In Favor of ECSR

Pro ESCR: most Bioethicists

-- Why only Focus on Relief of Suffering?
Elites Opposed to ECSR

Anti-ESCR: Fundamentalist, Evangelical and Catholic Leaders

-- Why Focus on Death of Embryos
Religious Groups in the U.S.

Catholics
Religious Groups in the U.S.

- Catholics
- Jews
Religious Groups in the U.S.

- Catholics
- Jews
- “Others”
Religious Groups in the U.S.

- Catholics
- Jews
- “Others”
- Protestants
Religious Groups in the U.S.

- Catholics
- Jews
- “Others”
- Protestants
  - Black Protestants
  - White Fundamentalists
  - White Mainline (or liberal) Protestants
  - White Evangelicals
Why Believe in Sanctity of Embryos?

- Catholics
- Protestants
  -- White Fundamentalists
  -- White Evangelicals
In general, would you approve or disapprove of the following:

- Low attenders
- Fundamentalists
- Evangelicals
- Mainline Protestants
- Liberal Protestants
- Traditionalist Catholics
- Moderate Catholics
- Liberal Catholics
- Other High Attendees

The graphs show the distribution of responses with bars indicating the fraction of respondents for each category.
Difference with non-Religious Public in Degree of Opposition To Research Cloning
Difference with non-Religious Public in Degree of Opposition To Research Cloning
What Drives Opposition?

All Americans prefer that things be “natural.”
What Drives Opposition?

All Americans prefer that things be “natural.”

Americans will over-ride their preference for nature for “good reasons.”
### Values in Conflict:

**Public Attitudes on Embryonic Stem Cell Research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embryo Moral Status</th>
<th>ESC Research</th>
<th>Policy Preference</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Approve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>70.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>85.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>None/Low</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>81.3</td>
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</table>
What Drives Opposition?

- All Americans prefer that things be “natural.”
- Americans will over-ride their preference for nature for “good reasons.”
- For some religious groups, the “good reasons” in the debate are not quite so compelling.
Differential Notions of Suffering

Religion is the Primary Source of the Idea that Suffering has Meaning

-- “the most decisive challenge which medicine raises for Christian convictions and morality involves the attempt to make suffering pointless and thus subject to elimination” (Stanley Hauerwas 1986: 24).
Respondent: [We have] close friends [who have] a daughter with degenerative muscular dystrophy. . . . It’s such a tragedy to see … a human being have to deal with what she knows is a... degenerative disease and... and she’s now wheelchair bound and will continue to get worse. But as far as a vibrant mind and a wonderful personality, she is a charming person but I guess that’s... if... if... if those parents had been able to remove that gene, wow. That would’ve been wonderful. However...

Interviewer: Okay.
Respondent: I think [genetic disease] can also be a growth experience for that family. I don’t think it’s the end of the world to have a child with a debilitating disease because parents rise to the occasion and they become more than they might have even know they could become dealing with it. So, I don’t think it’s the end of the world.
Relationship Between Religious Elites and their Constituents

Catholicism
Relationship Between Religious Elites and their Constituents

- Catholicism
- Mainline Protestantism
Relationship Between Religious Elites and their Constituents

- Catholicism
- Mainline Protestantism
- Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism
Conclusion

What Would an Elite-Free Debate Look Like?