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### Review of "The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy (Basic Bioethics)," edited by Suzanne Holland, Karen Lebacqz, and Laurie Zoloth

James Steele

*Franklin Pierce Law Center*

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*The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy (Basic Bioethics)* (Suzanne Holland, Karen Lebacqz, and Laurie Zoloth, eds., MIT Press 2001). ISBN: 0262582082 [288 pp., \$24.95. Softcover, Five Cambridge Center, Cambridge MA 02142-1493].

Perhaps like others, I started *The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate* not knowing many of the finer points of embryonic stem cell research, but I certainly had an opinion. This issue is far more complex than I had initially imagined. The editors do a commendable effort of compiling a sample of the innumerable arguments surrounding the debate.

While the initial articles provide biological and anatomical information, they were not without their biases. Aside from the opinions offered, the background science behind the debate is well presented and understandable to the layperson. The contributing authors explain that human embryo stem (hES) cells are the only human cells that can virtually regenerate diseased, dying, or scarred tissues. The advantage is restoration of organ function. For example, after a heart attack, the heart is permanently scarred and does not repair the damaged tissue – nor are there any cells in the adult human body that will replace such damaged tissue. The stem cells from a human embryo can grow and repair any human tissue that has been damaged and is unable to cure itself. The authors remind the reader to keep in mind that regardless of where one ultimately weighs-in on the debate, as of the time of publication, getting hES cells to replace damaged tissue may not be that easy.<sup>1</sup> One other fact continually emphasized is that research on the hES cells destroys the embryo.

The book is structured in a very logical manner beginning with the science behind the debate through the ethical issues to the final chapter discussing research and its role in society. Adding to the legitimacy of this compilation, the nineteen contributors have exceptionally varied backgrounds – many doctors, a lawyer, and laity – all with equally impressive professional successes. A saving grace for some readers is the ever-important glossary. One disadvantage is the number of acronyms and technical terms used throughout most of the book. It becomes clear that to have an educated discussion on the hES cell debate, one must know its language.

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1. See James A. Thomson, *Human Embryonic Stem Cells*, in *The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate* 22 (Suzanne Holland, Karen Lebacqz, and Laurie Zoloth, eds., MIT Press 2001).

Many of the opinions surrounding this debate are motivated by religion. Varied Judaic, Catholic, and Protestant viewpoints are represented. In addition, some moral and ethical opinions by secular authors are included.

While this work is quite thorough and implores the reader to really search deep when developing a stance on hES cell research, several considerations were not as fully developed. For example, very little was discussed in terms of the cost of this research and who it might benefit. In her piece discussing the 1999 National Bioethics Advisory Commission, Suzanne Holland correctly criticizes the report for not addressing "whether we ought to expend precious resources in this arena while daily, the number of persons without access to basic healthcare grows."<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Shannon brings us to the reality of the healthcare world: offering hES cell research may be a great thing, but insurance will probably not cover the treatment. Thus, those who are underinsured or without insurance entirely will not have the funds to purchase the treatment.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, the book included little mention of the argument against stem cell research based upon the notion that disease and human tissue degeneration are a normal and necessary part of life. All the authors basically take the position that curing all disease and living a longer life is right.

In summation, this book is a must for anyone who desires to be well-informed when taking a position on the human stem cell research debate. The best and most persuasive argument is the one that can see the situation from all angles. This book will take you that much closer to the omniscient debate.

James Steele \*

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2. See Suzanne Holland, *Beyond the Embryo: A Feminist Appraisal of the Embryonic Stem Cell Debate*, in *The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate* 83 (Suzanne Holland, Karen Lebacqz, and Laurie Zoloth, eds., MIT Press 2001).

3. See Thomas A. Shannon, *From the Micro to the Macro*, in *The Human Embryonic Stem Cell Debate* 184 (Suzanne Holland, Karen Lebacqz, and Laurie Zoloth, eds., MIT Press 2001).

\* Mr. Steele is a 2003 candidate at Franklin Pierce Law Center. He holds a B.A. in Political Science from the University of New Hampshire.