

THE CENTER FOR BIO-ETHICAL REFORM POLICY STATEMENT ON EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

The book, *The Nazi Doctors and the Nuremberg Code*, Annas & Grodin, Oxford Univ. Press, U.S., 1995 reports that Nazi physicians who performed experiments on death camp inmates attempted to defend their actions at trial by arguing, in pertinent part, that:

1. Their research did kill Jewish inmates but it advanced the cause of medical science.
2. The Jewish research subjects were going to be killed anyway so why throw away the opportunity improve the health of the larger society.
3. Many other countries were performing lethal research on inmates.
4. This research was lawful at the time.
5. Physicians who didn't participate were putting their lives at risk.

The Nazis wouldn't say it at Nuremberg but they also believed Jews were subhuman. StemCellGo.com, the website of a prominent embryonic stem cell advocacy group makes this same subhuman argument by contending that the victim of embryonic research is "a very early embryo, a small ball of a few cells, smaller than a period on a page." The notion that the size of physical features determines a victim's humanity is reminiscent of a January 27, 2005 news.BBC.co.uk article titled "Rwanda remembers the Holocaust:" It quotes a Rwandan genocide memorial visitor who observes that "'It shows how the Nazis started segregating people and it shows the way they measured the nose and eyes to show that they were different people. 'In Rwanda when they were killing Tutsis they did the same thing. They measured the nose. They were measuring the eyes, heights and its is very similar.'"

StemCellGo.com adds that embryonic stem cell research is justified because it advances the cause of medical science and the research subjects are going to be killed anyway. And on March 9, 2009, President Obama sought to justify embryonic stem cell research by saying that many other countries are doing it.

Stem cell scientists may not fear for their existence but many do fear for their professional lives. John B. Shea, at LifeIssues.net, "Freedom of Conscience in the Practice of Medicine," says of scientists forced to participate in embryonic stem cell research, "Many may fear that their careers may suffer if they are not perceived to be team players."

It is simply a lie to say that these embryos must be discarded. There is a robust embryo adoption program in this country and it needs to be better organized and funded. Embryos can be adopted and successfully implanted into the uteri of adoptive mothers. Improved means of transferring and saving these embryos should be the focus of our research, not devising new means of killing embryos.

Even the development of stem cell lines by removing cells from embryos in a supposedly non-lethal procedure is ethically problematic. This process is a variant of "pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD)" and involves the removal of one or two cells from a human embryo at three days following fertilization, which is the blastomere or cleavage stage of development. At this point the embryo's body is comprised of eight cells. This is the stage at which PGD is performed 94% of the time. This process

supposedly doesn't kill the baby but the removal of up to one quarter of the tissue in the child's body must surely pose risks which have not been fully ascertained to date.

Why are we freezing unborn children? One is reminded of the Nazi doctors who froze Jewish death camp inmates in gruesome experiments. Why are we amputating tissue from unborn children in processes reminiscent of the Nazi doctors who amputated the limbs of Jewish death camp inmates in research designed to measure the length of time it would take them to die.

President Obama says his removal of the ban on using federal funds for embryonic stem cell research will not lead to the cloning of human beings but this process is already legal in the United Kingdom, where research has already created the first human-animal hybrids (Guardian.co.uk, April 2, 2008).

It may strain credulity to compare born Jews with human embryos but in 1943, most Germans denied the humanity of the Jews being killed in concentration camps just as strenuously as most Americans today deny the humanity of the embryos being killed in research labs. That view of Jews seems crude and barbaric today and so it will someday be with that same view of human embryos.