

From: Harrison [haraz@comcen.com.au]
Sent: Monday, 24 July 2000 1:39 PM
To: laca.reps@aph.gov.au
Subject: Re: Human stem cell research - inquiry

> From: Harrison <haraz@comcen.com.au>
> To: laca.reps@aph.gov.au
> Subject: Human stem cell research - inquiry
> Date: Tuesday, 4 July 2000 14:57
>
> I wish to make a number of points regarding the current enquiry into stem
> cell and related research including the use of human embryo's.
>
> 1.0 I have serious reservations about the suitability of Kevin Andrews as
> the Chair of the committee investigating this on behalf of the Australian
> people. His views are well known and committed to a particular
> philosophical view which he has indulged before by placing them ahead of
> his
> obligations to the Australian electorate.
> 2.0 The emphasis on 'ethics' in this discussion is a cause for concern.
> Ethics is frequently exploited as allegedly higher moral ground by people
> with a particular philosophical bias. Ethicists do not have impartial
> views, nor do they have a grasp of the full spectrum of scientific
> knowledge and interests of wider humanity at the core of their views.
Where
> there is a clear religious bias, such ethical considerations should be
> relegated to that of a particular interest group. This at least would be
> an
> honest position to adopt. It is also prudent to bear in mind that
religion
> has spawned some of the most shameful aspects of human activity, yet
> persist in the inherently dishonest claim of the higher moral ground,
except
> where its proponents are caught out. Consider the role of religion in
> persecution of those who dare to disagree with them, the Nazi
atrocities,
> the destruction of cultures through missionary activity, social bigotry,
> exploitation of children and the promotion of values based upon medieval
> type superstition. Religious groups are historically prone to engage in
> more nefarious acts than branch stacking. The Southern Bio Ethics Group
and
> its affiliates will probably be no exception. They are entitled to have
> their say, but their views do not represent anything more than a
sectional
> interest group which is often out of touch with community interests and
> contemporary values; eg consider the Church's morality in concealing
> paedophilia within its ranks over many decades.
> 3.0 Philosophical imponderables. If human activity were to be put on hold
> until all the so called fundamental philosophical issues had been
resolved,
> we (or at least those who had positioned themselves as our lords and
> masters) would still be debating whether it was heresy to manufacture
and
> use a basic telescope to understand our planet, the solar system and

many

- > questions of basic physics! We would still be burning witches and
- > scientists and exorcising demons to treat disease. Whilst it is reasonable
- > to design legislation to guide human activity and minimise harm to living,
 - > real people; science should be allowed to proceed and we follow in its
 - > path. To pretend that we can but do otherwise is naive, silly arrogance.
 - > The reality is that every day thousands of human beings die from avoidable
 - > causes, yet we dont drop everything to discuss why and postpone all else to
 - > implement whatever the remedy is thought to be. To contend that human life
 - > is inviolable is utter dishonest nonsense. However, in our own western way
 - > human life is highly valued and we attempt to treat it as such.
- > 4.0 Just as scientific agriculture and medicine hasnt eliminated hunger and
- > disease on this planet so genetic based technology will not save mankind
- > from anything. The greatest contribution that politicians can make in this
- > endeavour, apart from keeping out of the way of scientists and
- > technologists is to ensure that all human beings can have the same level of
- > access to the benefits this science will bring. The likelihood is that both
- > politicians and the ethicists will fail magnificently in this relatively
- > modest goal.
- > 5.0 Personal choices must be left to individuals. It is the role of
- > democratically elected representatives to ensure that such choices are
- > available to the electorate. This is a relatively more modest role than
- > that of ethical arbitrator on behalf of some postulated almighty diety, but
- > it is at least honest. This is the only mandate you (politicians) have!
- > 6.0 Cloning whole human beings may be too much for many to get their
- > emotions around. But be assured that for most of the world it will be of
- > less interest than where they might get their next meal from. For me, if
- > there is nothing to gain from such clonong at this point, so let it slip a
- > little down the list of priorities. However, research using human embryo
- > cells must not be artificially impeded by politicians, the law or religious
- > 'authorities'. Religion masquerading as ethics must be kept out of our
- > Parliament. By all means set some guidelines so that the activities and
- > knowledge of scientists are known and accountable to their peers and allow
- > the community to optimise the benefit to the greatest number. Achieving
- > that alone will be more than a challenge and if successful a wonderful
- > political achievement.
- > 7.0 Pragmatically, banning this research and the materials it needs will
- > simply shift this activity to other places and for what reason? Vague
- > notions of ethics? Appeasement of the gods? The ego's of those who would
- > control us all?
- > Regards,
- > Alan Harrison