

What you need to know about the government's embryo bill

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12th February 2008



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When does life begin?

Human embryos are human beings in their entirety from the moment of their creation.

The colour of the child's eyes, hair, sex and even build are determined at the very beginning of its existence as an embryo.

Not just a blueprint

The embryo is not simply a set of instructions for making a new human being, like a blueprint for building a house.

Embryo grows itself

A blueprint is inert and cannot carry out instructions, but the embryo has the ability to grow spontaneously, constructing the skeleton, flesh, nerve connections and other systems of the human body.

Blueprint, builder and "house"

The embryo – already an essential human by virtue of the genes - is blueprint, builder and "house" together.

Our life

The person we are now is the same being as the embryo we once were.

If the embryo wasn't already a person, it couldn't become a person.

This cannot be said of the sperm or the egg, because alone they couldn't have developed into a human being.

Denial of freedom

Experimentation is of no benefit to the embryos.

The embryos have no ability to consent to experimentation.

Destructive experimentation denies them their freedom to live.

True ecumenism

A theologians' brief: On the place of the human embryo within the Christian tradition & the theological principles for evaluating its moral status (2001)

Christian tradition

- “Though penalties have varied, the Christian tradition has always extended the principle of the sacredness of human life to the very beginning of each human being, and never allowed the deliberate destruction of the fruit of conception”

Biblical teaching

- “Concern over the fate of embryos destined for research is inspired, not only by the narratives of the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Nativity, but also by the parable of the good Samaritan and the parable of the sheep and the goats: ‘Just as you did it to one of the least of these little ones you did it to me’.”

Not the right place for human life



Embryo research in Britain

In Britain embryo experimentation involves research carried out on human embryos up to 14 days after conception. The law in Britain requires that all embryos used in research be destroyed.

Where do research embryos come from?

Left-over embryos created in the laboratory for fertility treatment, or embryos specially created from donor eggs and sperm are used in research, where both parents have given their permission.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology or HFE Bill

- Currently in Parliament.
- Passed substantially unamended by the House of Lords.
- Due to be debated in the House of Commons.

HFE Bill

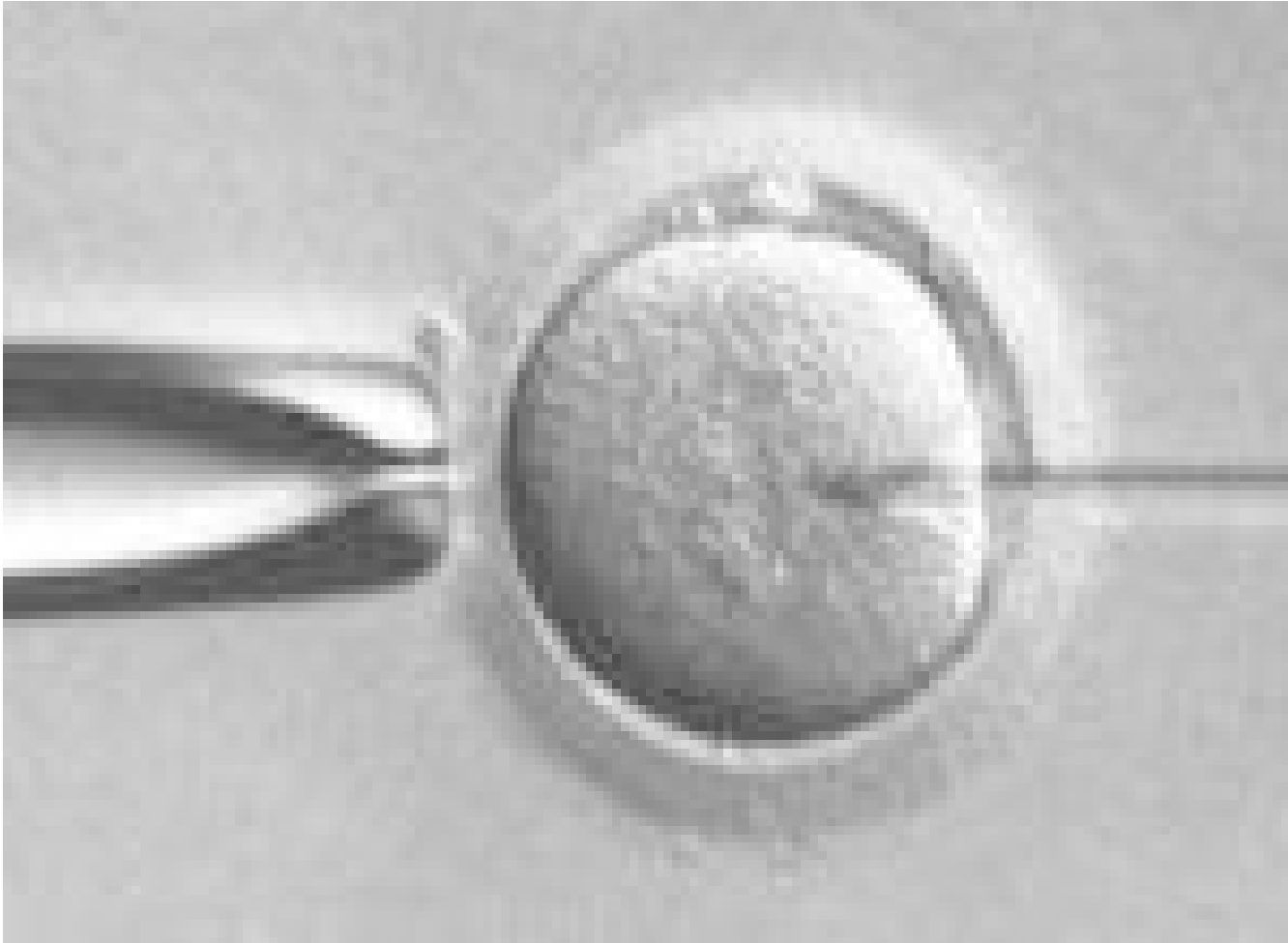
- significantly extends the power of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) to authorise lethal procedures on human subjects (embryos in vitro).
- proposes to legalise new abuses of human embryos.
- As such, supporting the bill breaches conventions upholding the right to life of all members of the human family.

The HFE Bill proposes to:

1. extend the general scope of in vitro fertilisation (IVF);
2. extend the definition of “embryo” to include those created by cloning and other processes;
3. widen grounds for testing of human embryos to decide whether to transfer them to the womb

4. widen grounds for research on human embryos that are not going to be transferred to the womb;
5. permit the creation of interspecies embryos for experiments;
6. permit gametes (sperm or eggs) to be taken from patients without consent.

In vitro fertilisation (IVF)



Embryos killed

Fewer than 5% of human embryos created through IVF survive to birth as they are exposed to dangers such as destructive experimentation, freezing, thawing, quality control testing and an increased miscarriage risk if they are implanted. Over a million embryos have perished in the UK alone since IVF was first introduced.

extending IVF

- The HFE bill moves away from regarding IVF as an “infertility treatment” – the original pretext for justifying the process in the 1984 Warnock Report, on which the existing law is based.

“reproductive technology”

- Instead it stresses “reproductive technology” in which human reproduction is put at the service of those who demand it – for childbearing (whether they are infertile or not) – and to fulfil the misplaced notion that wanting a child gives one a right to have a child.

'welfare of the child' – father?

- This trend is further accentuated by the weakening of the stress on the welfare of the IVF child, with the removal of the requirement to consider the child's need for a father.

A child, not just an embryo



disposal

- IVF also becomes the route for eliminating embryos thought to have a disabling condition, for creating embryos to provide treatment for others, and for generating embryos for research purposes and commercial gain.

commodities

- Thus IVF not only continues to result in huge loss of embryonic human lives, but in this bill embryos are made more freely available for experimentation and other abuses.

Gifts, not products

Embryos are gifts to be received in love, not products to be made according to quality control.

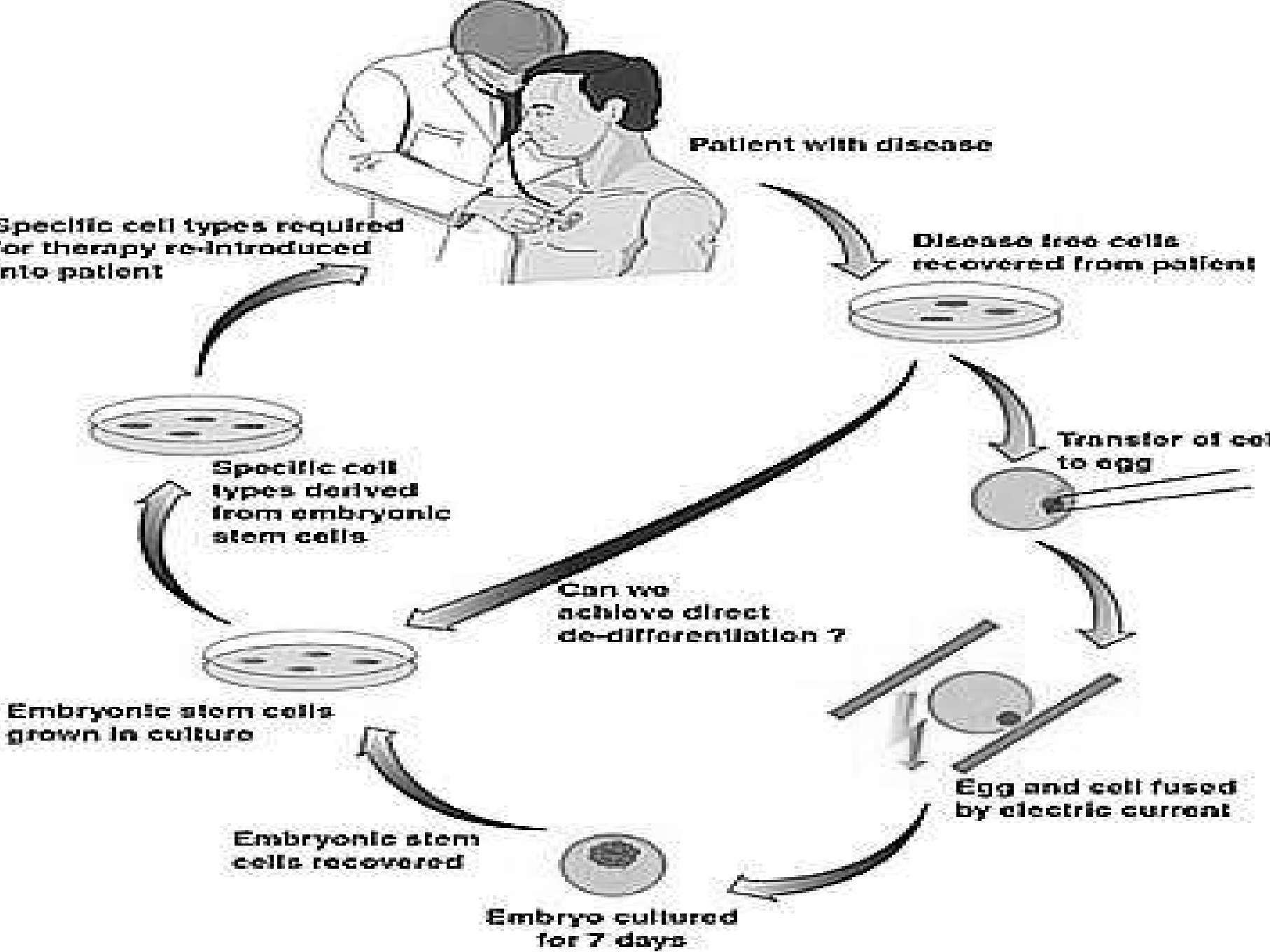
Each of us was once an embryo, including the doctors and scientists who experiment on embryos.

Human cloning

Egg without nucleus + nucleus of adult cell = cloned human embryo.

'Therapeutic' cloning: use in medical research.

'Reproductive' cloning: Creating a cloned embryo in the laboratory, implanting it in a womb and bringing it to birth.



Stem cells

Embryonic (killed)

Fetal (aborted or miscarried)

Umbilical cord blood (born)

Adult (alive)

'Reproductive' cloning ban

- The HFE Bill defines human embryo in a way that clearly includes those early human beings produced by processes other than fertilisation.
- In 2001, the transfer of cloned embryos to the womb was banned by statute, although creating such embryos for research has been permitted.

Ban undermined

- The 2001 Act is to be repealed by the HFE bill, on the grounds that the bill introduces a new category of embryos, “permitted embryos”, and only these may be transferred to the womb.
- In this way the current restrictions on cloning will be weakened, especially as the categories of “permitted embryos” within the bill may later be changed by Regulations.

Embryo research is a dud

Two decades of embryo research in the UK have produced no significant treatments for sufferers from degenerative conditions or congenital diseases.

All that's really been discovered is new ways of searching and destroying unwanted types of embryonic children.

There are alternatives

As the history of science has shown, problems previously thought impossible are continuously being overcome.

Therefore the claim that embryo stem cell research is the only way to understand how stem cells work has no basis in fact.

'Pluripotent' stem cells

- Normal cells modified to be like embryonic stem cells ('pluripotent')
- Just achieved in Japan and US
- Dolly the sheep creator has abandoned human cloning for this new idea.

'practice embryos'

- The Bill introduces a wholly new “research” purpose for which embryos may be created, namely the training of embryologists. It will be legal to create IVF babies for the technicians to practise on.

extending embryo testing

- Although the HFE bill steers away from allowing sex-selection for social reasons, it permits it when a sex-linked hereditary condition is suspected.
- Embryo testing to eliminate those with disabling conditions is readily countenanced in the bill.

hybrids

- One of the most controversial aspects of the HFE bill is the provision for creation of inter-species embryos (hybrids, 'cybrids', chimeras, genetically altered embryos).

Human?

- Although we cannot be certain of the nature of such embryos, those produced with a preponderance of human DNA would in all probability, according to experts, be human beings – having human characteristics and capacities.

uncertainty

- Of those embryos with a smaller proportion of human material, greater uncertainty arises as to the nature of the embryo – and therefore uncertainty as to whether such an embryo is a human being with due rights.

blurring the boundaries

- Deliberate blurring of the boundaries between humans and other species is wrong.
- How can it be right to generate such embryos when there is no clear answer to the question “how should we treat them”?

Human dignity

- The mixing of human and animal gametes (or the transfer of cells from an animal embryo to a human or vice versa) is an affront to human dignity.
- With the permission for creation and storage of inter-species embryos, the parents of a mislabelled embryo might include a sheep or a rabbit.

Danger to patients

- Since the aim with some such research is to extract cells to treat sick or disabled children or adults, there is danger to patients who may receive some animal genes.

Taking gametes (sperm or eggs) from patients without consent

- It will be permissible in certain circumstances for the gametes of children and those who are unconscious to be extracted without their consent having been given.

may vote against HFE Bill

- On an issue of fundamental moral principle such as the creation of entirely new creatures - human-animal hybrid embryos - parliamentarians not only may, but should vote against the HFE Bill.

must vote against

- There are simply no possible amendments to the that would make it ethically acceptable for a parliamentarian to fail to vote against the Bill on principle and as a whole.

What you can do

- Write to your MP, House of Commons
SW1A 0AA.
- Contact details for MPs
www.spuc.org.uk/mps

- The bill will sanction the creation of human-animal hybrid embryos.
- This is degrading to both humans and animals.
- This bill will allow the genetic manipulation of human embryos for research.
- Scientists should not create cloned human embryos and then kill them to remove their stem cells.
- Unlike stem cells derived from adults, human embryo stem cells have no application in medical treatment as yet.
- Human embryos are tiny human beings and should not be used for experiments.

resources

- Sign up for SPUC's alerts
www.spuc.org.uk/em-signup
- SPUC Facebook group – search for SPUC
or visit
www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2222831342

Pulling our weight

- Baroness O'Cathain: "My mailbag and Outlook box have never experienced such volume on a single Bill in my time in your Lordships' House."
- Baroness Neuberger: "Like other noble Lords, in the past 10 days or so I have been submerged beneath a huge pile of letters from many members of the public asking us not to legislate to allow hybrid embryos....The real concern that has emerged from this forest of trees under which we have all been sitting for the past few days is about interspecies embryos..."