

Testimony of  
**Father Kevin T. Fitzgerald**

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We are gathered today to continue the public dialogue regarding human embryo research, specifically that research which involves transferring genetic material from a human somatic cell into an egg that has had its nuclear genetic material removed-i.e. cloning.

The key moral issue in research involving cloned embryos is the creation and destruction of a human life--an embryo. Though there is no consensus in our society as to the value of this nascent human life, there is no denial that this research is highly contentious and controversial in our society. The question before our society and this committee is then, "how do we make the decision to proceed or not proceed with this kind of research?"

We Americans know from our own history with eugenics and with research on minorities, the mentally disabled, and even our own military forces, the tragedies that can occur when public policies concerning human experimentation are shaped according to the dictates of science. When facing the unknown or the uncertain, the answer of science is always to do the research. This is good science, but it may not be good public policy or the ethical thing to do. In response to the wrongs done in the name of science mentioned previously, our society has chosen to limit what experiments can be performed on human beings, even though these limits may slow scientific progress. If human embryos do have some significant value in our society, as the National Bioethics Advisory Committee concluded, then considering all the basic research that still can be done using animal models, human tissue culture, and adult stem cells, why is there a continuing clamor for the destruction of human embryos to fuel cloning research?

One reason almost always put forth by proponents of human embryo cloning research as justification for the creation and destruction of cloned human embryos is the need to bring healing and cures to the millions who suffer from illnesses and diseases that may otherwise die without this research. Such an argument as this is of great significance for it connects to a fundamental principle of medicine: treat sickness and heal when you can. Yet, as the argument is stated, its significance rests in part on two assumptions: 1) that cloned embryo research will be necessary, or superior to all other options, in the treatment of certain diseases, and 2) that the thousands and millions who need the treatments will have access to any medical advances that might come from such research.

Addressing the first assumption, we need to recognize that the diseases suggested as likely targets for human cloning research are also the targets of researchers using other approaches, such as genetic therapies, drug development, and adult stem cells. It may well be the case that for many patients the treatments for their illnesses may come more quickly from research avenues other than cloned human embryo research, and that these alternative treatments may even be better than any treatment derived from human cloning research.

Regarding the second assumption, we need to acknowledge that even if treatments from human cloning research prove to be the best available and are developed first, the vast majority of the millions of people who need these treatments will not have access to them. For example, no one denies that cancer research has generated many significant advances in cancer treatment over the past thirty years. Yet the President's Cancer Panel in their 2001 report conclude that "a great many people-both the privileged and the poor-find that at the very time they need the most effective cancer care our research enterprise has devised, the health care delivery system of our Nation fails them." Considering this tragic reality, and adding to it the fact that millions of children die every year from diseases preventable by vaccines, and the fact that some of the most effective drugs developed for certain diseases are not mass produced because no one will make a profit, one must seriously question any assertion that our society should pursue human cloning research because millions will benefit. This justification for pursuing this socially contentious and ethically controversial research is just false. Human embryos need not be created and destroyed in order that thousands or millions might be saved.

Indeed, without the continual creation and destruction of cloned human embryos the future of medical advance will still be one of great hope. There are many avenues of medical research that can be pursued with broad ethical and societal support. As a people who value progress and justice, we can decide to pursue every avenue of medical research that is respectful of human life in all its stages, and we can work to create a system that brings the advances in medicine to all those in need.

Thank you for your time and attention.