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Book Review: God and the Embryo: Religious Voices on Stem Cells and Cloning, edited by Brent Waters and Ronald Cole-Turner

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The two final chapters, "Casuistry with a Human Face" and "Sin and Failure in a Morally Complex World" (chaps. 6 and 7) provide pastoral guidelines and specific examples to flesh out the skeleton of ethical method.

B.'s diagrams, clear style, examples, glossary, and overall pastoral approach make the book an ideal text for undergraduates and study groups on Christian ethics. It also provides direction for specialists to further explore and develop questions of ethical method as they face the ever growing challenges of a morally complex world.

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GOD AND THE EMBRYO: RELIGIOUS VOICES ON STEM CELLS AND CLONING. Edited by Brent Waters and Ronald Cole-Turner. Washington: Georgetown University, 2003. Pp. viii + 228. \$26.95.

This collection of eleven essays by leading scholars, an expansion of a 2001 research colloquy at Garrett Theological Seminary, examines many religious and ethical questions in the stem cell and cloning debates. In her essay, "Freedoms, Duties, and Limits," Laurie Zoloth identifies with admirable clarity many of the deepest concerns of the volume: "embryonic stem cell research reawakens some core debates about ourselves, debates about who we are and what we are intended to do, core debates about the nature of the self and the duty to the other, the creature that is humanity and our frail creaturely being, and the vastness of our power and hence our responsibilities" (142).

The book is organized into three parts (Frameworks, Embryos, and Research) and weaves together timely analyses of vastly complex scientific discussions of present and potential therapeutic practice. Some subjects considered are: questions of definition of the human embryo and its moral status, the creation of embryos for biomedical research, debates about the destruction of human embryos in harvesting stem cells for biomedical research, theological and anthropological groundings for embryonic dignity, therapeutic and reproductive cloning, embryo creation by somatic cell nuclear transfer, the increasing convergence of *in vitro* fertilization technologies with stem cell and cloning research practices, legal and economic questions, and possible future medical therapies.

The volume highlights the search for a deeper moral understanding of the human embryo and examines public policy questions in the stem cell and cloning debates. In "The Ethics of Human Stem Cell Research," Gene Outka explores the potential human capabilities and the serious dangers in stem cell research. He carefully analyzes political and legal contexts and considers the fundamental moral status of human embryos and fetuses. Applying the "nothing is lost" principle to debates about the use of human

embryos in stem cell research, O. proposes that it is possible to distinguish between *creating* embryos for research and *employing* them in “the tangled aftermath of *in vitro* fertilization as a practice in our culture” (56). His analysis leads him to “regard employment of discarded embryos for research as morally tolerable, and no more” (59). He helpfully points to the increasingly close relationship between human reproductive technologies and the ethically contested use of human embryos in stem cell research and cloning procedures.

Brent Waters in “Does the Human Embryo Have a Moral Status?” examines questions of ontological standing, intrinsic value, parenthood, whether or not embryos may be included in a neighborly-love ethic, and how embryonic status is adequately understood and protected in a time when many grieve “the loss of a procreative context” (72). W. argues for “proposed thresholds within the laboratory” that could afford “embryos some minimal protection from the most grievous exploitation” (72–73).

Ted Peters and Gaymon Bennett in “A Plea for Beneficence: Reframing the Embryo Debate,” engagingly argue that the potential good to be achieved through human embryonic research warrants a larger place in the moral debates. P. and B. support stem cell research and cloning for research purposes in the service of healing and observe that “theologically informed beneficence reframes bioethics” (125). Their argument appeals to “an eschatologically informed theological anthropology” (126), but they do not adequately substantiate this warrant, nor do they sufficiently address fundamental questions of human dignity in these procedures.

In “Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research: Ethics in the Face of Uncertainty,” Kevin Fitzgerald carefully studies meanings of the term “embryo” and considers how differing scientific understandings of the human embryo may be related to uncertainties about the meanings of human nature itself. He also offers astute observations on social questions concerning human embryo research in the light of greatly stressed health care systems.

Its focus on the human embryo distinguishes this book from other studies that attempt to address too many issues under the same cover. The editors succeed well in bringing religious and moral views into creative dialogue. The essays are accessible, clearly written, and well referenced. The appendixes present nine official statements and documents of religious communities, as well as “Human Cloning and Human Dignity: An Ethical Inquiry,” the 2002 statement from The President’s Council on Bioethics. Careful readers may notice a few minor text editing errors (e.g., 45) and some repetition, as individual authors provide similar descriptive background in scientific discussions. This fine collection deserves to be warmly welcomed by bioethicists, scholars, graduate students, advanced undergraduate students, and others who wish to reflect on the pressing scientific and moral questions posed by these new technologies.