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978-0-521-57683-3 - The Embryo Research Debate: Science and the Politics of Reproduction

Michael Mulkey

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Scientific research involving human embryos was a major topic of public debate in Britain during the 1980s. Despite strong support from the scientific community, embryo research was initially condemned by many ordinary people as well as by special interest groups, and came close to being banned by Act of Parliament. Michael Mulkey describes the dynamics of the parliamentary struggle over the future of embryo research, focusing on such issues as: the clash between the anti-abortion and pro-research lobbies; the tactics of the Government; political ideology; the media's role; the importance of gender; religion; the impact of science fiction; the lure of medical advance; and the difficulty of maintaining ethical control. He explains how the advocates of embryo research eventually triumphed, and ends with an examination of the cultural tensions that linger after the debate.

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Preface and acknowledgements

The main text of this book takes the form of a historical narrative, based upon close examination of documentary records, which tells the story of the public debate over embryo research in Britain. I have tried to provide a richly descriptive account of the debate which is informed by the relevant academic literature, but which is not encumbered by constant reference to academic issues and which is directly accessible to readers with no knowledge of that literature.

A straightforward narrative form is well suited to the topic of the embryo research debate. But it is by no means the only formal framework that may be used to throw light on this sequence of events. Indeed, my first, preliminary, attempt to explore the debate was written in the quite different form of a dream fantasy. I have included this alternative portrayal as an epilogue to the main text, in the hope that its unusual format will encourage readers to examine their own views on the social and moral significance of scientific research involving human embryos, and to reflect on the story presented in the preceding chapters.

This book re-examines, and places in a wider context, some of the findings I have presented in a series of articles published between 1993 and 1996. Several of the topics covered in those articles have been omitted from the book, however, whilst some of the arguments have been revised and a substantial amount of new material has been introduced. In other words, the series of articles and the book differ considerably in scope and in content.

I wish to thank the following people for their encouragement and for helping me in various concrete ways: Kenneth Boyd, Daniel Callahan, David Edge, Alan Handyside, Henry Leese, Lucy Mulkey, Jack Scarisbrick and Steven Yearley. I also thank the Economic and Social Research Council for awarding me a grant for the years 1992–4 (R 000 23 3722),

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during which time I carried out most of the detailed research on the embryo research debate; and the Warden and Fellows of Nuffield College, Oxford, who elected me to a Norman Chester Senior Research Fellowship for the Michaelmas term 1995, and thereby enabled me to bring the work to completion. In addition, I am grateful to the anonymous referee who examined the complete manuscript of this study with great care and whose comments were most helpful.

I thank Professor R. G. Edwards, the editor of *Human Reproduction*, for granting me permission to reproduce 'Intruders in the fallopian tube or a dream of perfect human reproduction', which was first published in *Human Reproduction* 6 (1991), 1480–6. I thank IOP Publishing Ltd and the editor of *Public Understanding of Science* for allowing me to draw upon the following of my articles: 'Embryos in the news', 3 (1994), 33–51; 'Changing minds about embryo research', 3 (1994), 195–213; 'Political parties, parliamentary lobbies and embryo research', 4 (1995), 31–55. I thank Sage Publications Ltd and the editor of *Social Studies of Science* for permission to draw upon my article 'Galileo and the embryos: religion and science in parliamentary debate over research on human embryos', 25 (1995), 499–532, copyright © 1995, Sage Publications Ltd. I thank Sage Publications Inc. and the editor of *Science, Technology and Human Values* for permission to draw upon the following of my articles: 'Women in the parliamentary debate over embryo research', 19 (1994), 5–22; and 'Frankenstein and the parliamentary debate over embryo research', 21 (1996), 157–76, copyright © 1994, 1996, Sage Publications Inc. I thank Daniel Callahan, President of the Hastings Center, for giving me permission to quote from the *Hastings Center Report*, January–February 1995, pages 39 and 42; Professor Dr Erwin Chargaff for permission to quote from 'Engineering a molecular nightmare', *Nature* 327 (21 May 1987), pages 199–200; the *Daily Mirror* for permission to quote two passages from the 'Baby Special' which appeared on 19 April 1990; Georgetown University Press for permission to quote from pages 13–14 of I. G. Barbour, 'Religion, values and science education', in D. Gosling and B. Musschenga (eds.), *Science Education and Ethical Values* (Georgetown University Press, 1985); HarperCollins Publishers for permission to quote from pages 124–5 of Andrew Kimbrell, *The Human Body Shop: The Engineering and Marketing of Life*, (HarperCollins, 1993); the Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority for permission to quote from page 4 of *Sex Selection: Public Consultation Document* (HFEA, 1993); *The Independent Newspaper Publishing Plc* for permission to quote from the issue published on 23 April 1990; The Labour Party for permission to quote from pages 100 and 102 of the *Report of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party 1985*; Macmillan

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Abbreviations

ALRA	Abortion Law Reform Association
BMA	British Medical Association
CORE	Comment on Reproductive Ethics
GIFT	gamete intra-fallopian transfer
HFEA	Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority
ILA	Interim Licensing Authority
IVF	<i>in vitro</i> fertilization
MRC	Medical Research Council
NIH	National Institutes of Health
SPUC	Society for the Protection of Unborn Children
VLA	Voluntary Licensing Authority