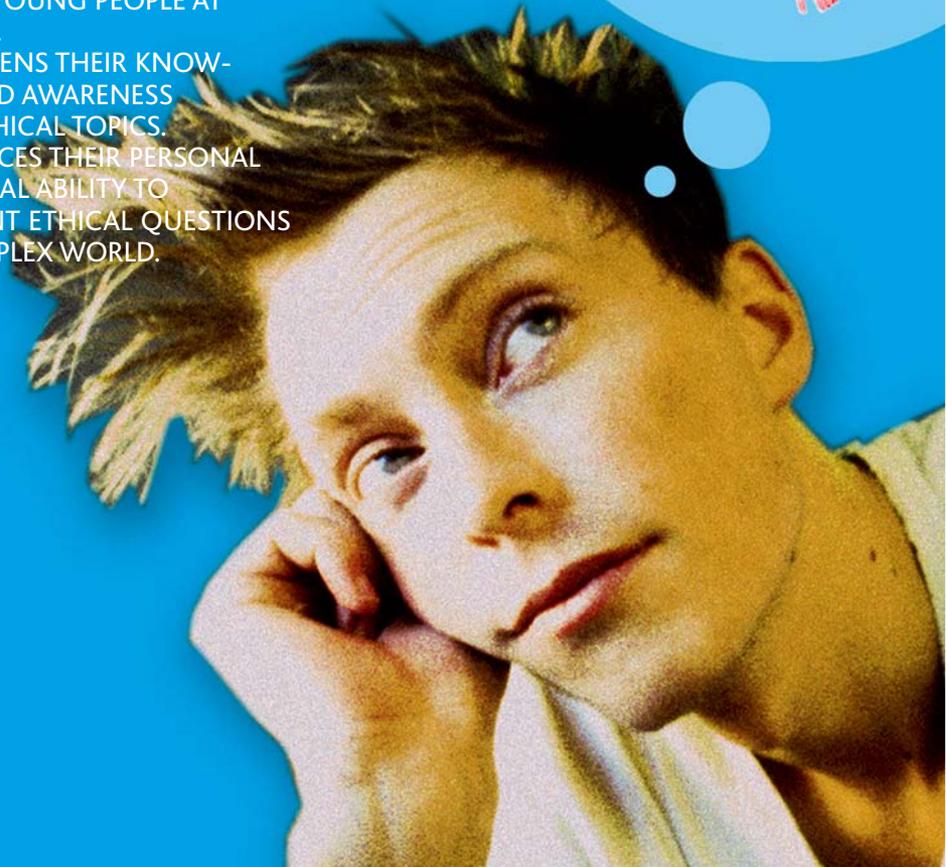


ETHICAL FORUM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE 2005

THE ETHICAL FORUM FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE IS A TEACHING
AND DEMOCRACY PROJECT
ORGANIZED BY THE DANISH
COUNCIL OF ETHICS
IT MEETS YOUNG PEOPLE AT
EYE LEVEL.
IT HEIGHTENS THEIR KNOW-
LEDGE AND AWARENESS
OF BIOETHICAL TOPICS.
IT ENHANCES THEIR PERSONAL
AND SOCIAL ABILITY TO
CONFRONT ETHICAL QUESTIONS
IN A COMPLEX WORLD.





THE YOUNG PEOPLE OF
TODAY ARE THE DECISION-
MAKERS OF TOMORROW.
THAT'S WHY THEY'RE ONE
OF THE MOST IMPORTANT
TARGET GROUPS FOR
DEDICATED TEACHING IN
THE ART OF DEBATING
ETHICS AND VALUES

THE ETHICAL FORUM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- A TEACHING AND DEMOCRACY PROJECT

The Danish Council of Ethics wants to improve young people's knowledge and awareness of bioethical topics – and to coach them in the art of discussing fundamental values in a democratic manner. As a result, the Ethical Forum for Young People has both an educational and a democratic purpose. It consists of three main components:

TEACHING MATERIAL – Confronting ethical dilemmas

A free teaching booklet for graduating classes of lower-secondary school. The booklet has been compiled by the Council of Ethics and focuses on a specific bioethical topic. It contains sober information about the "state of the art" of the biotechnology in question as well as imaginative case-stories and suggestions for exercises and essays.

ETHICAL FORUM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE – Wrestling with arguments

All classes that have worked through the teaching material are encouraged to nominate one pupil from their midst to participate in the Ethical Forum for Young People. From those nominated, the Council of Ethics will select 17 pupils, to match the number of members on the Council. These 17 young people will meet for two days to discuss the ethical questions connected with the theme. Members of the Council of Ethics will act as initiators and facilitators of the discussions.

STATEMENT FROM THE ETHICAL FORUM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE – Shaping public opinion

The 17 members of the Ethical Forum for Young People will complete their two-day meeting with a declaration about the theme in question. This declaration will then be printed and sent to all schools, as well as Parliament and the media. It can also be read on the Council of Ethics' homepage.

The statement from the 2003 Ethical Forum for Young People on "Biotechnological transformation of people" has been translated into English and can be read on the Council of Ethics' homepage: <http://www.etiskraad.dk/sw316.asp>

The Council of Ethics would be pleased to share information and experiences on the Ethical Forum for Young People. Please contact the Council at the e-mail address: info@etiskraad.dk

STEM CELLS AND ETHICS

The most recent teaching material is entitled "Sorted and Sussed", and is about ethical problems linked with the use of stem cells. The central dilemma presented by the booklet is the issue of whether the scope for essential improvements in treating disease can justify the use of stem cells from human embryos that perish in the process.

The booklet contains factual knowledge about stem cells and about the possibilities stem cell technology is expected to provide. It contains a presentation of the ethical problems associated with the use of stem cells. And finally, it contains imaginative case-stories that will stimulate discussion and encourage students to adopt a position. In terms of both language and layout, the booklet meets young people head-on, at eye level, making the ethical issues relevant and interesting.

Two examples are given below from "Sussed and Sorted. Doubts about Stem Cells and Ethics". In example 1, young people are encouraged to use a discussion already familiar to them as a springboard, i.e. the discussion about abortion. The intention is that by doing so, they will take a stance on a question central to the debate on embryonic stem cell research – the question of the moral status of early, human life.

Example 2 is a case that tells the story of a couple who have to decide what to do with their frozen, fertilized eggs. The story leads into a discussion of which weighs more heavily: being able to research into disease management or protecting the life of the embryos. The young people are encouraged to argue the case in the classroom, to act out role play or to write essays.

EXAMPLE 1:

Respect for life

You can practise by discussing the question of abortion

You may never have considered your attitude to research into stem cells taken from embryos, but you're bound to have thought about your views on abortion. The two issues are not identical, but they are alike. The reason is that, faced with taking a stance on whether you are for or against induced abortion and deciding whether you are for or against research into stem cells from embryos, you are going to have to think about your attitude towards early human life. What is it ethically justifiable to do with early human life?

Below are two examples of women who have made different choices. *Clarissa Fairchild* chose to have an abortion, but has never forgotten the child she opted not to have. She can be said to hold the view that early human life is not nothing. It commands respect. But on the other hand it does not have an unconditional claim to protection of its life.

Sophie Kelley chose to keep the child she was expecting. She holds the view that life begins at the moment of conception and was therefore unable to envisage having an abortion, although she fell pregnant at a time that actually suited her really badly.

Use the stories of Clarissa and Sophie as a springboard for a classroom discussion about your views on the ethical status of early, human life.

[In the teaching material, there then follow fictitious conversations with the two women who tell the story behind their choices.]

EXAMPLE 2:

Case: Donation of embryos for research

Jacky and Jeremy are the parents of twins Jason and Julia. Jacky and Jeremy had been trying to become parents for years, but Jacky only managed to become pregnant when she underwent assisted reproduction treatment at the hospital's fertility clinic. She was given hormone treatment to mature as many eggs as possible. Six eggs were removed and fertilized in a petri dish with Jeremy's sperm. When the embryos had been developing for six days, two of them were implanted in Jacky's womb. The remaining four were put into frozen storage. The twins were born just over one year ago.

Under Danish law, embryos may be frozen for two years at most. The fertility clinic has now contacted Jacky and Jeremy to inform them that the maximum freezing period will soon expire. That means that Jacky and Jeremy must make up their minds what to do with the four embryos in the freezer. They're in agreement about not wanting any more children: two is enough. On the other hand, however, they're not happy about asking the fertility clinic to destroy the four embryos. For Jacky and Jeremy, the eggs are not just things to be discarded lightly. They have a special value. Instead of having the eggs destroyed, Jacky and Jeremy can choose to donate them to research into disease management or research aimed at enhancing assisted reproduction (AR) techniques. But is that any better?

EXERCISES

Role play

Act out a role play showing the conversation between Jacky and Jeremy when they are confronted with deciding what to do with the embryos in the freezer.

Before the actual exercise, you can discuss in class the approaches it is possible to take. This will give the students you have chosen as actors a few different arguments to work with. Some possible points of view are listed under the heading "Essay" a bit further down this page. You can also draw inspiration from the two interviews with the youth politicians Gudrun Lang and Sophie Hæstorp Andersen.

You might want to consider using stand-ins for the exercise. Behind each of the actors, position an extra actor to take over the role if the actor in front runs out of lines or the stand-ins have any good ideas generally about the way in which the exercise might progress.

If you like, try finding other ideas for a drama exercise. How, for example, do Jason and Julia react when they grow up, only to be told that embryos that might have become their "brothers and sisters" were destroyed or used for research purposes?

Essay

Write an essay or composition about your feelings and views on donating embryos for research. Which do you think it is more important to be able to research into, treating disease or protecting the life of the embryos (after all, the embryos perish when used for research)? Remember to give reasoned arguments for your opinions.

Here are a few points of view that may inspire you to find your own. Read the two interviews with Gudrun Lang and Sophie Hæstorp Andersen as well.

IN FAVOUR of donating to research

An embryo up to six days old left over from assisted reproduction treatment is entitled to some degree of protection. But that protection can certainly be weighed against other considerations. For example, the consideration for research that seeks to develop treatments for severe disorders that it has not previously been possible to treat effectively.

So if research holds out hope of great benefits for disease management, it is ethically acceptable to override the protection of embryonic life. Indeed, not only is it ethically acceptable: Donating an embryo to research, and hence contributing to the possible development of a treatment to benefit severely ill people with no current prospect of a cure, is actually doing something really good and altruistic.

And the embryos are going to be thrown away after all. In that situation, it is ethically preferable to use them for research rather than simply destroy them. And it may well be that some people will say that's the same as using an embryo as a means—and that's wrong. But surely we all use one another as a means of achieving

something all the time. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as the end is good.

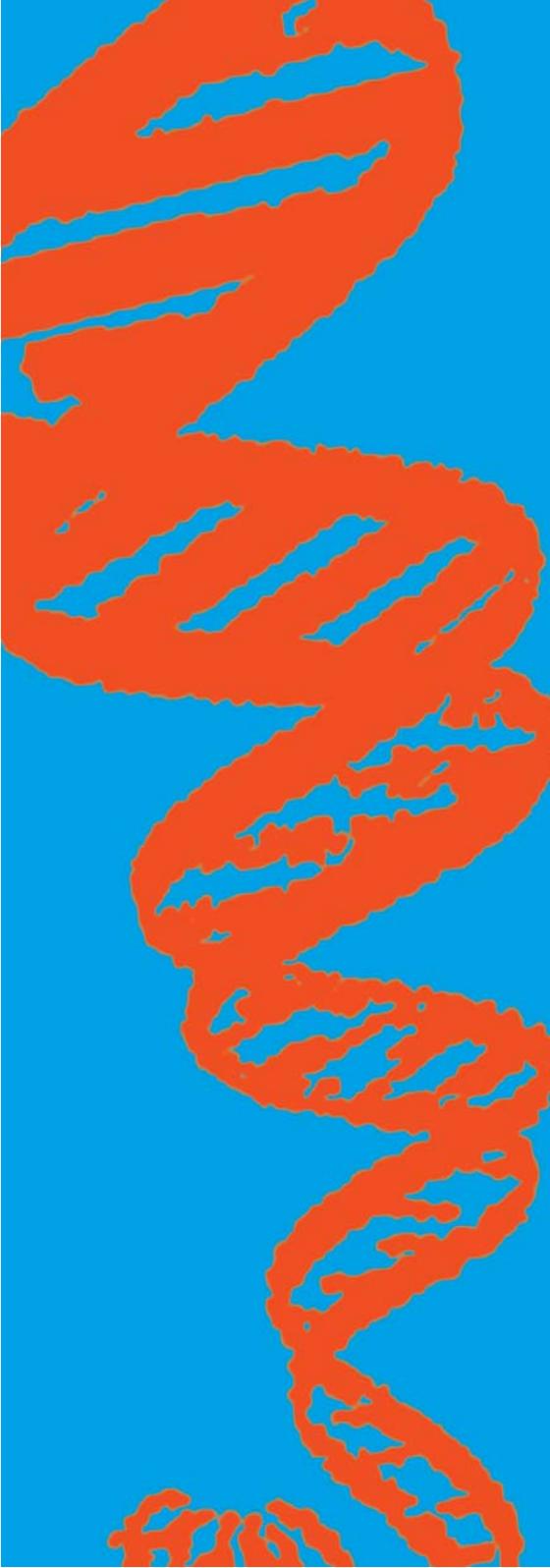
AGAINST donating to research

An early embryo is a little human being. It is quite unacceptable, therefore, to remove stem cells from a live embryo with the effect of causing the embryo to perish. It's just as wrong as killing a child. Not even the most "essential research" can justify that.

Once you accept that others' needs and interests are more important than protecting unborn life, you're on a slippery slope. The limits of what can acceptably be done with embryos and fetuses will slowly begin to shift. Those limits will then be determined not merely in the interests of treating disease but also in the interests of product development in, say, the cosmetics or the paint and varnish industry.

The 'commodification' that follows from using embryos for research is no less so for those embryos having to be destroyed anyway. So to say "they're going to be destroyed anyway..." is not an ethically tenable argument.





The Danish Council of Ethics has two tasks: One is to advise the Danish Parliament, ministers and public authorities on the ethical issues associated with the researching and application of biotechnologies and genetic engineering pertaining to human beings, nature, the environment and foodstuffs. The other task is to inform the general public and to stimulate the debate about these issues.

The Danish Council of Ethics consists of 17 unpaid members who are appointed because of their interest in bioethical dilemmas.

For further information please visit the Council's homepage at www.etiskraad.dk