

## Talk Back: More than Cells

### 1. The gift of medicine

What medical treatments are acceptable / unacceptable / unwise?

Paracetamol; cleft palate op; cosmetic surgery... Brazil bum lift

Luke 10:34; Is 38:21; Matt 9:12; Mark 5:26; Col 4:14; Prov 15:13;

Proposition: medicine is part of God's common grace.

It shouldn't be used to do anything that God's word contradicts

It can be used to relieve suffering and prolong life

Medical intervention for lifestyle reasons seems less justified

Where does fertility treatment fall in this spectrum?

### 2. Human Life is Precious

- Right to life comes from being image bearers (Gen 9:6, Ex 20:13)
- Everyone who is a human being is a person who should not be killed
- Many texts talk about the person, known by God, in the womb. Therefore the life of a person begins with conception so ending that life is murdering that person.
- praises God because he "created my inmost being... you knit me together in my mother's womb". God saw his "unformed body", that is he saw the psalmist as an embryo and as a person.
- Job 31:15; Psalm 139:13-16; Psalm 51:6; Isaiah 44:2; Jer 1:5; Luke 1:41 (Greek word Luke uses same for baby inside and outside the womb)

### 3. The Autonomous Self

What is a human being? What is the self?

Ancient world – spirit good; body bad

Modern twist: personhood Theory

Person – moral and legal rights

Body – expendable biological organism

Person: Self-aware, social, embodied, and sentient (able to both think and feel and imagine). "Possessing sufficient mental capacities to be considered a person."

We separate the biological entity from the person, then the community can decide whether that person exists, and the individual ("the authentic self") can decide what that person does.

If body is just material there is no purpose, no right way for it to be treated. If nature is amoral, we can just impose our will, or the will of the collective.

#### **4. Assistive Reproductive Technology (IVF etc)**

What technologies know about?

Since the late 1970s a revolution in our understanding of embryology and reproduction has meant that assisted reproductive technologies (ARTS) are now increasingly available. These ARTs include artificial insemination by husband (AIH), artificial insemination by donor (AID) and especially in vitro fertilisation (IVF) with its variants, such as, intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) and gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT). Less technologically there is also surrogacy in various forms.

What you think Bible condemns, is silent on or supports. What reasons as a Christian might you justify the use of ARTs?

We know that Human life begins at fertilisation. When a man's sperm fertilises a woman's ovum, a new, genetically-unique, one-cell entity, technically known as a human zygote, is created. The amazing development of a zygote into a blastocyst, a morula and an embryo represents the early stages of fully human life, and as such they deserve the greatest respect and protection.

A distinct kind of dualism. Soul and flesh/body Psalm 63:1; Psalm 44:25:

The inner life of the soul is expressed in the outer life of the body

Against the idea that life begins at implantation, viability, or any other stage. Scientifically, philosophically and theologically the life continuum has only one starting point – fertilisation. In addition, we repudiate the idea that life during these early stages is merely 'potential' human life, or even 'non-person' life. The truth is simple – a human embryo is an embryonic person, as once we all were.

God gives us our children. His benediction on our first parents was, 'Be fruitful and increase in number ...' (Genesis 1:28). Our 'children are a reward from him, like arrows...' and 'Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them' (Psalm 127:3-5). Furthermore, God is sovereign in both fertility (Luke 1:36-37) and infertility (1 Samuel 1:5).

As many as 1 in 6 couples are now considered to be infertile. We acknowledge the longing and heartache experienced by many who cannot have children. Traditionally, such infertile couples could raise a family by adoption, with its wholesome biblical precedents, such as, 2 Samuel 9 and even Ephesians 1:5.

We reject the idea that anyone has 'the right' to children. Some consider that all technological 'making' of children is morally unacceptable. Children as laboratory products is an uneasy concept and very different from normative parenthood, which is characterised by the procreative act of married union and associated with profound human interrelationships. The intervention of laboratory technicians is something else.

Nevertheless, we concede that AIH is the least objectionable of these technologies. It can be suitable for a married man and woman where the former, perhaps because of physical limitations or medical reasons, cannot naturally inseminate his wife. By contrast, AID is wrong primarily because it brings a third party into the marriage. It is at least technical adultery.

In vitro fertilisation (IVF) is a most dangerous enterprise. It is not just its poor success rate of about 20%. Nor is it just the costs, which are financial (about £3,000 per treatment cycle), psychological (characterised by stress and relationship failure) and social ('the right' to children and jeopardising family structure when third-party gametes are used). Nor is it just the problems of multiple pregnancies (low birth weight, increased long-term disabilities, increased stillbirths and maternal health problems), which currently account for about a quarter of all IVF babies in the UK. Nor is it that IVF brings about unnatural dilemmas, such as, grandmothers giving birth to their grandchildren, posthumous fatherhood, and post-menopausal women giving birth.

Our principal objection to IVF centres is on the creation of 'spare' embryos. IVF invariably use drugs so that the woman super-ovulates and produces many ova – a hazardous practice since between 1 and 2% of women will suffer ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS). These ova are then mixed with sperm and any resultant embryos are assessed before 'the best' are selected and transferred to the woman's womb. This is nothing other than quality control, or old-fashioned eugenics. The remaining 'spare' embryos face three unacceptable fates – freezing for future fertility treatment, destructive experimentation, or immediate destruction. Unknown thousands and thousands of human embryos are destroyed in IVF clinics every year. Almost 9 out of every 10 human embryos created for IVF, die by IVF. It is a reprehensible venture.

Surrogacy may initially seem to be a less objectionable practice. But it usually begins with either the artificial insemination of the surrogate, or the production and transfer of IVF embryos, derived from the gametes of the commissioning couple. That is, three people are always involved in the conception, birth and early environment of the child. Surrogacy therefore challenges the creational ordinance of the marriage covenant. The disastrous outcome of the surrogacy pact between Sarai, Abram and Hagar (Genesis 16) should serve as a sufficient warning – it is best avoided.

What have ARTs achieved? Of course, they have produced some lovely bouncing babies. But does the end ever justify the means? ARTs have produced a chilling view of human life – embryos are little more than biological materials, sexuality is merely a biological phenomenon. They have engendered a clinical, dehumanised world where there is not much awe, little reverence, and virtually no dignity. In short, ARTs have encouraged the commodification of children and the trivialisation of human life.

These are difficult questions to answer. Some people would say that using donated sperm to fertilize an egg—or donating your own egg so someone else can conceive—is wrong because it seeks to bypass God's will. If God wanted that person to have children, the thinking goes, she wouldn't need sperm from anyone other than her husband. However, if we take this reasoning to the extreme, then we would have to say that it is also God's will for a person with appendicitis to die, because performing life-saving surgery would “bypass God's will.” Such reasoning is fallacious because medical intervention is not inherently sinful.

Still, there is a difference between saving a life in jeopardy (performing an appendectomy) and using medical procedures to aid in God's creation of a new life. Just how much scientific advancement is God-honouring ([1 Corinthians 6:19–20](#); [10:31](#))? Is all technology something God desires His children to make use of? In these “grey” areas, a believer in Jesus needs wisdom. It is good to gather detailed information and make a careful study of the procedures involved in donating sperm/eggs or receiving donated sperm/eggs. Also, it is wise to consult with doctors and other believers and, above all, to spend much time in prayer.

Ultimately, the creation of life is still in God's hands ([Psalm 139:13–16](#); [Ephesians 2:10](#); [Psalm 110:3](#)). Science may aid someone in getting pregnant, but technology is not the source of life, and God can still prevent any pregnancy He doesn't want to happen. At the same time, God allows sin even though He disapproves of it. So, the question remains: is it sinful to donate sperm/eggs or to receive donated sperm/eggs? There are some important issues to consider regarding donating sperm that could help someone make an informed, God-honoring decision. The first two questions are for a man who is considering donating sperm:

First, is the donated sperm to be distributed among unknown mothers? If so, you have no way of knowing if your child will grow up in a loving home, if he will be brought up to know the Lord, or even if she will have a two-parent home. Would contributing to an abusive family situation honor the Lord? If there's a possibility that your child will not be reared in a godly home, and if that possibility leaves you without peace as you pray about it, then it's probable that the Lord doesn't want you to donate.

Second, what effect will your donation have on the child it helps to create? If you are not going to rear the child yourself, the child may struggle for years with

questions about why you would “sell” him and never be a part of his life. Online blogs exist for children searching for their biological fathers (or “sperm donors”), as they try to come to terms with their unusual heritage.

Now, a question for a married woman considering using donated sperm: have both you and your husband considered the ethical and moral implications of introducing another man's sperm into your body? God designed marriage to be a union of a man and a woman to become “one flesh” ([Genesis 2:24](#)).

For women considering donating eggs, the questions concerning their children's home life and emotional well-being apply just as much to women as to men. Also, how will the eggs be used? To actually aid an infertile couple in pregnancy or to further embryonic stem-cell research?

And, finally, a question for anyone to consider: is the sperm from the sperm bank used to fertilize more than one ovum (as in the [in-vitro](#) procedure)? Will the donated eggs all be fertilized? If so, multiple zygotes/embryos will be created, and some of them may later be destroyed because too many are growing in the womb. Other “extra” embryos are frozen and never implanted. If you agree that abortion is wrong, then you would probably agree that such treatment of embryos is also wrong.

## 5. Cloning

Two main methods

- a) Cloning using somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT): get nucleus from one cell and put it in a surrogate embryo. (N.B. This is not IVF)
- b) Embryo Splitting: inducing twinning (possibly quadruplets)

Reasoning

Therapeutic: these cells can develop into any of 100 cell types and used to repair bodies

Reproductive: copying yourself or someone else you want replicated with desired characteristics and connection. human reproductive cloning currently illegal

Creating surrogates that have a genetic connection to parents – especially significant for same sex couples

Why

Self-serving

Breaks out of God's design for children conceived within covenant marriages between a man and woman

Likely to become a commodity that the rich and powerful control

Exploitation and destruction of human embryos