

## **Stem Cell Research**

3/30/05

Thank you for allowing me to address the committee today as a supporter of Senate Joint Resolution 18. My name is Barry Ferst: I am the chair of the Carroll College philosophy department. I am also a member of the Helena Jewish community, and so I wish to address this committee both as a professor of philosophy and a Jew.

In contrast with other religions, Judaism has no problem with "playing God" provided one does so according to God's revealed laws as understood by the best rabbinical scholars. Far from being shunned, "playing God" is a religious imperative: the concept of emulating God is implicit in the mandate to heal and provide effective medical relief whenever possible. As is well known, Jews have served for hundreds of years as physicians not only to other Jews but also to members of all three Abrahamic faiths, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Interestingly, the only two professions ascribed to God in the Hebrew Bible, the Tanakh, are teaching and healing.

Therefore, for Jews there is no reason that microscopic manipulation of genetic material should not be as well pursued as the surgical manipulation of visible organ or tissue. Normative Jewish law encourages medical intervention to correct both congenital and acquired defects, and makes no distinction between stem and somatic (body) cell tissue.

According to current Jewish ethical thinking, an embryo developed by in vitro fertilization that has not been implanted on a human uterine wall is neither a viable fetus nor a human life. Consequently, there is no Jewish legal opposition to using such material for research or to further enhance the life of a living person.

As a member of the Helena Jewish community and as an academic philosopher for the past quarter century, I must fully support Senate Joint Resolution 18. It behooves those concerned with the betterment of the human condition to avail themselves of what the Torah, the Christian Scriptures, the Qur'an, and human rationality directs compassionate human beings to do. Any other path would only be to the detriment of the human soul and spirit.