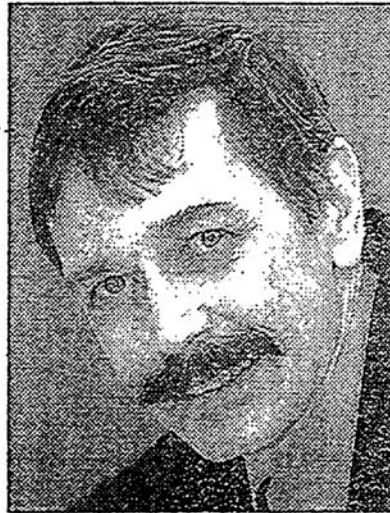


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DAILY TELEGRAPH · 26 NOV 2001
INTERVIEW BY ROGER HIGHFIELD

lobby which, earlier this year, tried and failed to prevent the use of cloned embryos and spare *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) embryos for research on stem cells, the body's master cells.

Yesterday's news from



Prof Prentice: Christian

Advanced Cell Technology (ACT), based in Worcester, Massachusetts, will give new urgency to efforts by the pro-life lobby to reopen the debate about the limits of embryo research and what we actually mean by a "person", also questioning whether we need to use embryos at all to harvest stem cells, the progenitors of all cell types.

Prof David Prentice of Indiana State University, Terre Haute, who took part in the United States debate over research on stem cells, argued that adult stem cells offer a proven and preferable alternative to embryonic stem cells for developing treatments for Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, stroke, spinal cord injuries, heart disease and diabetes.

Prof Prentice, a committed Christian who recently started

attempts to "rebrand" them as pre-embryos) or feeling. Nor do they have identity, since they can sometimes split and recombine.

Yesterday, a member of the ACT team, Dr Michael West, insisted that the cloned embryo they had produced was "cellular life" and not a human life.

Those in favour of "therapeutic cloning", such as Dr West, argue it would be unethical, even cruel, to put the rights of this embryo above those of a patient given that we live in an age of abortion, "spare" IVF embryos are often destroyed and human life can be taken with justification in circumstances such as war.

Unlike a foetus, murderer or enemy soldier, a blastocyst is not sentient or rational. No cruelty to it is therefore possible. Moreover, to ban all embryo research could result in incalculable suffering in future.

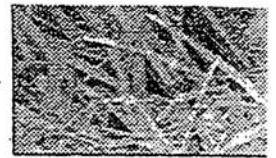
The pro-life lobby counters that an embryo is sacred and to use it is tantamount to human sacrifice.

To Prof Prentice, the blastocyst's hollow ball of about 100 cells, smaller than the full stop at the end of this sentence, really is a person.

He takes "potentiality" as his baseline for life: at the moment of fertilisation, that person is born.

But cloning does not require fertilisation.

Here Prof Prentice switches his definition: a person results when a person's genetic makeup is placed inside an egg, akin to how Dolly was created (even though the Pro-Life Alliance successfully argued in court that a cloned



Clockwise from left

More

Prof Ian Wilmut

IT IS still too early for American scientists to claim success in cloning a human according to the method used for the first animals.

Researchers at Advanced Cell Technologies say they have produced at least one human embryo using "the technique".

But Prof Ian Wilmut, who led the research on Dolly the sheep at the Roslin Institute, believes there is not yet enough evidence to claim with certainty that the embryos are clones.

But if Advanced Cell Technologies can confirm its findings, reported in the journal *Nature*, it would be the most significant development in cloning in five years.

Dolly may have become the world's most famous

embryo is not a human embryo).

Another criticism of the technique is that if, as some scientists believe, a blastocyst implanted in a woman's womb does not have the potential to become a baby, then it is not a human embryo. As said there were 14 embryos implanted into the uterus of the woman, not least because the technique is too

Moving home or