

To the Editor, *Crisis*:

The article, “Anti-Science? Pro-Life Dream Team Confronts Embryonic Stem-Cell Juggernaut,” (January 2006) fails to clarify sufficiently for readers the two decisive issues raised by the ANT/OAR proposal.

(1) (a) The basic question, first of all, is what defines the nature of an embryo, and on the basis of what criterion do we make this judgment? The claim that the OAR-generated product is “reasonably and with certitude” a non-embryo rests on a particular interpretation of an Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical axiom (*agere sequitur esse*) and, more generally, on an interpretation of the Aristotelian-Thomistic notion of organic substance (hylomorphism). The OAR defenders’ *scientific and empirical* judgment, in other words, is mediated by a *philosophical* judgment. The content of this philosophical judgment is expressed in their conviction that Aristotelian-Thomistic biology is, for all important purposes related to OAR, equivalent to or compatible with a “systems-biology perspective” (as they understand it). We reject this claim of equivalence, and thereby the OAR defenders’ conclusion regarding the nature of the OAR-generated product.

(b) Our concern with moving immediately into animal experimentation, then, derives from a rejection of the philosophical premises whereby the OAR defenders would interpret the experimental data. The OAR defenders’ assumed philosophical premises permit them logically to consider only two possibilities with respect to such data. On the one hand, if the OAR-generated entity is implanted into the uterus of a competent female and an embryo develops, it will be clear to all that the procedure produced an embryo and must not be applied to humans. If, on the other hand, the entity, when implanted, were to develop into a tumor, the OAR defenders’ philosophical presuppositions commit them in advance to the conclusion that that entity would *necessarily have been a non-embryo* from the beginning, and that the procedure could thus be applied to humans. Our argument is that this conclusion follows only if one already grants what we take to be their dubious reading of the Thomistic notion of organism. We hold, in other words, that a correct understanding of the Thomistic notion of organism leads, on the contrary, to the judgment that, although the OAR-generated entity might behave like a tumor when implanted, it was more likely—with reasonable certitude—to have been an embryo in its original coming into being, albeit an embryo engineered in advance to begin virtually instantaneously to act in a non-embryonic manner (exhibiting pluripotency rather than totipotency).

(2) Secondly, a central core of the OAR Joint Statement signatories acknowledges the possibility that the OAR procedure may not be 100% reliable, even if performed rigorously and with the results they expect. That is, in a “statistically negligible” number of cases, it may “fail,” and thus produce embryos. The signatories insist that, notwithstanding the possibility of this failure, there is no reasonable moral doubt about going forward with the procedure. Why not? Because the *intention* not to produce embryos can in such a case, by virtue of an appeal to the principle of double effect (as they understand it), still justify the risk of occasionally (in a “statistically negligible” number of cases) mistakenly producing an embryo.

In sum, then: the full-time faculty of the John Paul II Institute and the editorial staff of *Communio* reject the philosophical premises that the OAR defenders take to warrant their claim that the OAR-generated product is, reasonably and with certitude, a non-embryo; and we reject the appeal to the principle of double effect and good intentions that would lead them to moral acceptance of the procedure in the scenario of a “statistically negligible” number of homicides.

Readers interested in the many discussions with the OAR signatories on these points may wish to visit *Communio*’s website at [www.communio-icr.com/ant.htm](http://www.communio-icr.com/ant.htm)

David L. Schindler  
Dean and Gagnon Professor of Fundamental Theology  
Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family  
at The Catholic University of America

—  
Editor, *Communio*