



Stem-Cell Research: The Promise and the Pitfalls

Stem-cell research promises someday to develop cures for currently incurable medical conditions. Does this noble goal justify research that involves destroying human embryos?

In 1978, the first so-called “test-tube baby” was born. This baby was conceived in a laboratory petri dish, not a test tube. An egg taken from the ovary of the mother was fertilized with the sperm of the father. When the fertilized egg divided into more cells to form a tiny, days-old embryo, a doctor implanted it into the mother’s womb. The embryo developed naturally to a fetus and finally a baby was born.

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Called “in vitro (in glass) fertilization,” this procedure allowed couples who were not able to conceive a child naturally to give birth to their own children. Since 1978, in vitro fertilization has been widely accepted throughout the world (although not by some religions).

In vitro fertilization has a significant “byproduct.” Usually, a couple supplies enough eggs and sperm to create a number of embryos. As they divide into more cells in the lab, some embryos are healthier than others. After a few days, a doctor selects one or more of the embryos to implant into the mother. The rest are “spares” or surplus.

In some cases, parents have given their consent for researchers to conduct experiments on their unused embryos. In 1998, researchers were able to remove “stem cells” from donated fertility clinic embryos.

In young embryos (about 3–7 days old), two layers of cells form into a hollow ball called a blastocyst.



Ethical questions surround stem-cell research. (Amanda Rohde/iStockphoto.com)

The outer layer is destined to become the placenta, which attaches to the mother’s uterus and provides a means for nutrients to pass to the growing fetus. The inner layer consists of stem cells.

(Continued on next page)

Making a Just Society

This edition of *Bill of Rights in Action* examines issues surrounding the making of a just society. The first article looks at one of the most contentious issues today—stem-cell research. The second article explores President Abraham Lincoln’s ideas on American democracy. The last article looks at the ideas of medieval scholar St. Thomas Aquinas on what makes a just society.

Current Issues: Stem-Cell Research: The Promise and the Pitfalls

U.S. History: Slavery, Civil War, and Democracy: What Did Lincoln Believe?

World History: St. Thomas Aquinas, Natural Law, and the Common Good

Stem cells are pluripotent. This means they have the remarkable capability of forming all the specialized cells of the body such as skin, muscle, nerves, and bone.

The Promise of Stem-Cell Research

Researchers discovered that when they removed stem cells from an embryo and put them in a petri dish with nutrients (called a culture), the individual cells re-divided indefinitely into “stem-cell lines.”

Scientists experimented with these pluripotent stem cells, attempting to find out whether they could coax them into becoming specialized cells of the body.

If researchers in the lab can transform stem cells into somatic (body) cells, surgeons might be able to implant them into patients suffering from medical conditions caused by defective or damaged cells. Scientists also theorize that they may even be able to use stem cells to grow entire replacement organs. This is the future promise of stem-cell research.

One study concluded that more than 100 million Americans suffer from diseases, disorders, and injuries that might someday be treated or cured by stem-cell transplantation. For example, patients with heart disease, diabetes, birth defects, and severe burns could benefit.

The greatest potential for stem-cell therapies involves injury or loss of nerve cells that, unlike other body cells, cannot regenerate (reproduce) themselves. Currently, such conditions as severe strokes, spinal-cord injuries, and Alzheimer’s disease are treatable but incurable.

Parkinson’s disease is another example of the nervous system gone awry. Cells in the brain that make dopamine, a chemical necessary to transmit signals between nerve cells, die and do not regenerate. Patients experience uncontrollable shaking, lose the ability to walk, and finally are bedridden and die. Researchers are hoping to use stem cells to grow healthy dopamine-producing cells to implant into the brains of Parkinson’s patients.

None of these uses for stem cells in treating or curing human medical conditions exists yet. Researchers must overcome significant barriers. The biggest problem is to learn how to prompt human stem cells to form nerve or other specialized somatic cells as they do naturally in the developing embryo. Apparently, chemicals, electric fields, and interactions with neighboring cells in the embryo are necessary to turn stem cells into particular body cells. Researchers cannot do this yet with human stem cells. They have, however, done this with stem cells from a few animals.

If scientists are able to coax human stem cells to grow into a variety of body cells, a patient’s immune system still may reject them, the same problem that sometimes occurs with organ transplants today. Another risk is that transplanted cells might turn into deadly cancers or move to unwanted areas of the body.

Sources of Stem Cells

The controversy over stem cells arises from how scientists get these special cells. Right now, most come from surplus embryos donated by parents undergoing in vitro fertilization.

Fertility clinics routinely discard unused embryos or freeze them for future use by the patients who provided them. But the process of freezing and thawing embryos or keeping them frozen for a long period may destroy them. A tiny number of frozen embryos have been adopted for use by other childless couples and when born are sometimes called “snowflake children.”

When researchers receive embryos from a fertility lab, the embryos are only a few days old. But they are alive and growing. The researchers destroy the embryo as a unified organism when they physically remove the stem cells to grow them in the lab. The pluripotent embryonic stem cells can never become babies since the placenta layer of cells is no longer present.

There are sources for stem cells other than embryos. So far, however, scientists have concluded that only embryonic stem cells can form virtually all the different cells in the body. Umbilical-cord stem cells mostly produce blood cells. Only a few stem cells from the umbilical cord can form other types of somatic cells. Bone-marrow stem cells continuously produce blood cells. At least some stem cells in adults seem to be able to generate more than one somatic cell type. But these stem cells are relatively few in number and have a limited ability to divide in a lab culture.

Umbilical-cord and somatic stem cells are not pluripotent and do not grow as vigorously in the lab as those found in a blastocyst. The one advantage of umbilical and somatic stem cells is that they do not require the destruction of embryos to get them.

What About Cloning?

In 1996, scientists cloned a sheep they named “Dolly.” Cloning basically means genetic copying. It involves a process scientists call somatic cell nuclear transfer.

To clone Dolly, researchers took the genetic material, or DNA, from the nucleus of a somatic cell of one female

sheep. They then inserted it into a second female sheep's egg cell whose DNA had been removed. After receiving a careful burst of electricity, the egg began to divide into an embryo as if a male sheep's sperm had fertilized it.

The researchers implanted the tiny embryo into the uterus of a third sheep that gave birth to Dolly. Theoretically, Dolly was a living genetic copy of the first sheep in the cloning process.

Since the birth of Dolly, scientists have cloned other animals. No one, however, has succeeded in cloning a human being. Moreover, researchers have discovered a high degree of abnormalities in cloned animals. For example, Dolly had arthritis at an early age.

Researchers, including the scientist who cloned Dolly, are increasingly turning away from "reproductive cloning," trying to make genetic copies of entire animals. Instead, they are researching the potential of using the cloning process as another way to produce animal and human stem cells.

Scientists theorize that they may be able to take DNA from a somatic cell, say a skin cell, of a Parkinson's patient, insert it into a hollowed-out donated human egg cell, and grow an embryo. Scientists would remove stem cells from this embryo and prompt them in the lab to form dopamine-producing cells. Surgeons then would implant these cells into the brain of the Parkinson's patient to replace those that had been lost.

This method, called "therapeutic cloning," would have the likely advantage of using a patient's own genetic material to produce cells that his or her immune system would not reject. But troubling moral issues remain. Should researchers pay women to undergo the procedure necessary to secure their egg cells? Also, the embryo resulting from therapeutic cloning still will be destroyed when the stem cells are removed.

The Moral Debate

Strong moral objections are raised to stem-cell research that destroys human embryos. The Roman Catholic Church, long a foe of abortion, probably has developed the most comprehensive moral argument against human embryonic stem-cell research:

- The fertilized egg is a "human subject" at the moment of conception. From that point on, the embryo is a human individual with a soul and is part of God's plan.

- The newly formed human has "moral status" and rights, especially the right to life. Experimenting on human embryos is a crime against their dignity and right to life.
- Harming the embryos or stopping their development is a "gravely immoral act."
- Working for the "common good" such as helping others who are suffering cannot justify evil ways to do it. Purposely destroying an embryo to remove stem cells for research or treating others is inherently wrong.
- Even making use of stem-cell lines that come from embryos destroyed in the past by other researchers is wrong. Such use still makes the current researcher complicit in the original immoral act.

Many Protestant Christian churches agree with the Catholic view of embryonic stem-cell research. Other world religions tend to differ over when the embryo acquires "moral status" as a human person with a soul.

Some ethical experts outside of religions also have serious doubts about continuing embryonic stem-cell research. They see danger in tampering with human life and argue it is not worth killing human embryos for research that may lead nowhere. They say it is better to limit research to umbilical and somatic stem cells.

Other ethical experts argue that it would be immoral *not* to continue with embryonic stem-cell research:

- Millions of people in the world may someday benefit from embryonic stem-cell research and treatments. Should the moral status of a group of 50–100 cells automatically outweigh that of a person suffering from Parkinson's disease?
- The blastocyst is too "primitive" to be a person with full human rights. Even so, researchers should treat it with respect and use the stem cells only for good medical reasons.
- "Personhood" comes later in the development of the embryo and fetus when such things as feeling pain, brain activity, and taking on a human appearance become evident.
- It is not entirely true that researchers destroy an embryo when they remove its stem cells. The DNA in the stem cells lives on in the lab and hopefully later in the bodies of patients with severe diseases.
- Most stem cells for research now come from surplus fertility clinic embryos that are going to be discarded or will die naturally over time. Why not make use of them for the benefit of humanity?

Stem-Cell Research and U.S. Law

Given all the controversy over embryonic stem-cell research, few laws regulate it in the United States. As yet, even reproductive human-cloning research is not unlawful in the United States except in a few states.

On August 9, 2001, President George W. Bush announced a compromise for federal funding of embryonic stem-cell research. He issued an executive order that limited funding to research on about 70 embryonic stem-cell lines then in existence. The embryos that yielded the stem cells for these “presidential lines” had already been destroyed. Bush declared there would be no federal funding for stem-cell research that caused the “further destruction of human embryos.”

Bush agreed that federal funding would continue for research on umbilical-cord, somatic, and animal stem cells. His executive order would not affect private companies, universities, or other institutions not relying on federal funds for their research.

Soon it became clear that only 20 or so of the 70 “presidential lines” were usable. Mutations affected some lines while others stopped growing. Some scientists argue that eventually all stem-cell lines grown in a lab will degrade and become useless for research unless replaced by new ones.

In 2006, Congress passed a bill allowing federal funding to cover new stem-cell lines created by donated surplus embryos from fertility clinics. President Bush, however, vetoed this bill in the presence of “snowflake children” born of embryos frozen at fertility clinics. “These boys and girls are not spare parts,” Bush said. “They remind us what is lost when embryos are destroyed in the name of research.”

Meanwhile, some states and private companies are funding embryonic stem-cell research without the federal restrictions. In 2004, California voters approved \$3 billion in bonds to fund stem-cell research. In the 2006 election, Missouri voters amended their state constitution to allow stem-cell research. Outside the United States, governments and companies are also competing to achieve the promise of stem-cell cures.

For Discussion and Writing

1. What do you think is the strongest argument for each side of the stem-cell research controversy?
2. Why do researchers think embryonic stem cells are better than umbilical-cord and somatic stem cells?

Glossary of Stem-Cell Research Terms

blastocyst A hollow ball of cells or very early embryo that develops in the days after fertilization; it consists of stem cells and cells that will become the placenta.

cloning A method of producing theoretically genetic copies by transferring the DNA from a somatic cell of one individual into an egg cell without its DNA of another; the resulting embryo may be implanted into a mother’s womb for reproductive purposes or grown in a lab to harvest the stem cells for research.

in vitro fertilization Sperm are added to eggs in a fertility clinic lab, producing embryos for transfer into a mother’s womb; researchers remove stem cells from surplus in vitro embryos.

pluripotent The unique characteristic of embryonic stem cells that enables them to form all the specialized cells of the body.

somatic cells The specialized cells of the body such as those forming skin, nerve, and muscle, but not sperm and egg cells.

stem cells Mostly embryonic cells that can re-divide indefinitely and are pluripotent; umbilical and somatic stem cells are not pluripotent, but researchers are discovering that some may produce more than one type of somatic cell.

stem-cell line A group of stem cells that can re-divide indefinitely in a research lab; derived from an embryonic stem cell or some other stem-cell source like the umbilical cord.

3. Some believe that the United States should outlaw all cloning research. What is your view on this? Why?

For Further Reading

Gibbs, Nancy. “Stem Cells, the Hope and the Hype.” *Time*. 7 Aug. 2006: 40-46.

Ruse, Michael and Pynes, Christopher A., eds. *The Stem Cell Controversy, Debating the Issues*, 2nd ed. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2006.

A C T I V I T Y

A U.S. Policy on Embryonic Stem-Cell Research

1. Form small groups to discuss U.S. policy options on embryonic stem-cell research.
2. After discussion, each group should choose one of the policy options and prepare a defense of it based on information from the article.
3. Each group should finally present its policy choice and defense to the rest of the class.

Policy Options

- A. Prohibit federal funding of all embryonic stem-cell research while encouraging only research that does not destroy human embryos.
- B. Permit federal funding of research only on embryonic stem-cell lines formed by surplus fertility clinic embryo stem cells that existed before August 9, 2001. These are the “presidential lines” that President Bush made eligible for federal funding on that date.
- C. Permit federal funding of research on stem-cell lines created on an ongoing basis from surplus fertility clinic embryos.
- D. Permit federal funding of research on stem-cell lines created on an ongoing basis from surplus fertility clinic embryos as well as from embryos created by cloning for research.



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Slavery, Civil War, and Democracy: What Did Lincoln Believe?

When Abraham Lincoln became president in 1861, the United States faced the serious challenges of slavery and a possible civil war. Many doubted that American democracy would survive. What did Lincoln believe about these difficult challenges?

Abraham Lincoln barely had one year of formal schooling, but he educated himself by reading books. He read histories, biographies, the Bible, Shakespeare, and English legal classics. He especially studied collections of speeches by masterful orators like Henry Clay.

Like Thomas Jefferson and the other founding fathers, Lincoln believed in the power of human reason to advance society. Although he attended religious services and often used references from the Bible in his speeches, Lincoln never joined a church.

Lincoln left behind many of his frontier roots and embraced science, technology, and progress. He was enthusiastic about Charles Darwin's new theory of human evolution. He became the only U.S. president to hold a patent on an invention (a device to lift boats off sandbars). But he also accepted the prevailing theory that inherent differences separated the races.

Lincoln's political hero was Henry Clay. Clay was a Kentucky slave owner and member of Congress who ran for president three times but never won. The leader of the Whig Party, Clay was most famous as "The Great Compromiser." This referred to his role in forging the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and the Compromise of 1850. These compromises produced an uneasy balance between the Northern and Southern states that put off war between these sections over slavery.

Even before he entered politics, Lincoln wholeheartedly supported Clay's "American System." This included building a national transportation system as well as placing high



President Abraham Lincoln sat with cabinet members for the first reading of the Emancipation Proclamation. (Library of Congress)

tariffs on imports to protect young industries. Lincoln also agreed with Clay that slavery, if confined to the Southern states, would eventually die away as the national economy changed.

Lincoln's Early Views on Slavery

Lincoln believed that American democracy meant equal rights and equality of opportunity. But he drew a line between basic natural rights such as freedom from slavery and political and civil rights like voting. He believed it was up to the states to decide who should exercise these rights. Before the Civil War, both Northern and Southern states commonly barred women and free black persons from voting, serving on juries, and enjoying other such rights.

Lincoln strongly believed slavery was "a great evil." He did not, however, join with the small minority of Northern abolitionists, who wanted to outlaw slavery immediately. Lincoln preferred to emancipate the slaves gradually by compensating their owners with federal funds.

Lincoln also supported the idea of providing government aid to the freed slaves, enabling them to establish colonies abroad. Lincoln thought that in their own black nations, they would finally enjoy equal political and civil rights.

In 1832, when Lincoln began his political career in Illinois, he joined Henry Clay's Whig Party. Although Illinois voters elected Lincoln to the state legislature and to a term in the U.S. House of Representatives, he made little impression.

Lincoln decided not to run for re-election to Congress after his term ended in 1848. He then started a prosperous law firm in Springfield, Illinois. In 1854, however, the explosive issue of expanding slavery into the Western territories drew him back into politics and ultimately to the presidency.

Lincoln's "House Divided" Speech

Henry Clay's Missouri Compromise of 1820 prohibited slavery in any future territories carved out of the northern part of the Louisiana Purchase. In 1854, U.S. Senator Stephen A. Douglas, an Illinois Democrat, led Congress in passing a law that would open the possibility of expanding slavery into this area.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act left it up to the voters in the Kansas and Nebraska territories to decide the legal status of slavery. Douglas called this "popular sovereignty." This law enraged many Northerners because it repealed a key provision of the Missouri Compromise and opened the way for organizing future slave states in the West. The Kansas-Nebraska Act also led to the formation of the Republican Party.

Those who joined the new political party included abolitionists and a much larger number of "Free-Soilers" who simply wanted to prevent the expansion of slavery into the Western territories. Many Whigs, including Abraham Lincoln, switched to the Republican Party.

In 1855, Illinois Republicans nominated Lincoln for a seat in the U.S. Senate. Senators were elected by state legislatures then, and Lincoln lost the contest in the Illinois state legislature. But he was back in 1858 to challenge one of the most powerful political leaders in the nation, Stephen A. Douglas.

On June 16, 1858, Lincoln spoke before the Illinois Republican Party Convention to accept the nomination for U.S. senator. Lincoln focused his speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the recent Dred Scott Supreme Court decision. In that case, the majority of justices had further undermined the Missouri Compromise by ruling that a slave taken by his master into a free territory or state remained a slave.

In his acceptance speech, Lincoln summarized his position on the expansion of slavery by quoting the words of Jesus: "A house divided against itself cannot stand" (Matthew 12:25). "I believe this government cannot endure, permanently, half slave and half free," Lincoln declared.

Lincoln argued that slavery in the United States would eventually have to end everywhere or become legal everywhere in order for the nation to survive:

Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South.

Lincoln then attacked his opponent, Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, the chief author of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Lincoln charged, "he cares not whether slavery be voted down or voted up" in Kansas and Nebraska. Douglas' "care not" policy, Lincoln asserted, merely invited slave owners to "fill up the territories with slaves."

Lincoln's First Inaugural Address

Lincoln went on to debate Douglas on the "popular sovereignty" controversy. Although Lincoln lost his second attempt to win a Senate seat, his "House Divided" speech and debates with Douglas made Lincoln a national political figure.

In February 1860, Lincoln stunned a gathering of Eastern Republicans who were considering a number of candidates for president. The strange-looking "rail splitter" from the West delivered a carefully researched speech that demolished the arguments of the Southerners who claimed the expansion of slavery was constitutional. A few months later, the Republicans made Lincoln their presidential nominee.

Lincoln won the bitter presidential election of 1860 against three opponents, including Stephen A. Douglas. Lincoln swept the electoral votes of the Northern states, but only won 39 percent of the popular vote. Even before his inauguration, a number of Southern states seceded from the Union.

In his First Inaugural Address on March 4, 1861, Lincoln had two purposes. First, in a final attempt to avoid war, he tried to reassure Southerners that he had no desire to interfere with slavery where it already existed. He even quoted a provision of the Constitution requiring that anyone who committed a crime and fled to another state "shall be delivered up." He pointed out that this provision applied to slaves who ran away to free states.

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Lincoln's second purpose was to contend that no state had a constitutional right to secede. He warned that the Constitution required him to make sure "the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the States."

Lincoln cautioned Southerners to think carefully about secession, which he said would only lead to anarchy or dictatorship. "In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not mine, is the momentous issue of civil war," he declared. A little over a month later, Confederate cannons fired on Fort Sumter in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. And the Civil War began.

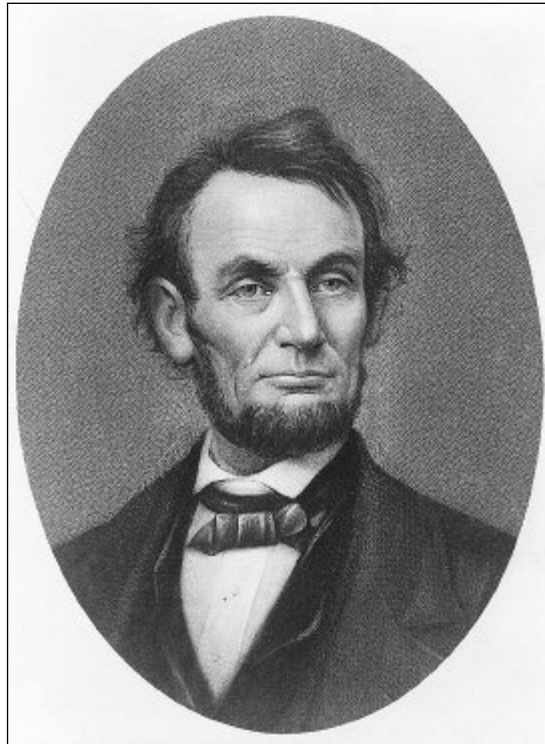
The Emancipation Proclamation

Some Union commanders and Congress itself tried a few times to free slaves in the early years of the Civil War, but Lincoln overrode these efforts. He still held out for gradual compensated emancipation followed by the creation of colonies of freed slaves in Africa or other areas outside the United States.

Lincoln met with black leaders for the first time in August 1862 and lectured them about his colonization plan. They were not enthusiastic. Apparently, it never occurred to Lincoln (or to most other white Americans at the time) that black people had much stronger ties of history, language, and religion with the United States than with Africa.

In the end, military necessity drove Lincoln's emancipation of the slaves. A few days after the Union victory at Antietam on September 17, 1862, Lincoln issued an ultimatum to the Confederacy. He threatened that he would declare all slaves in the areas of rebellion "forever free" unless the Confederacy surrendered within 100 days.

When Lincoln's deadline passed, he remarked, "The promise must now be kept." On January 1, 1863, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation "as a fit and necessary war measure" for suppressing the



Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery in territories under Confederate control. Following the Civil War, the 13th Amendment banned slavery in the entire country. (Library of Congress)

rebellion. Using his powers as commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy, Lincoln proclaimed all slaves within the rebellious states and areas "are, and henceforward shall be free."

In his proclamation, Lincoln also called on the freed slaves to "abstain from violence" and "labor faithfully for reasonable wages." Finally, he shocked the South by welcoming ex-slaves "into the armed service of the United States" (free African Americans were already serving). Lincoln said to those present, "I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do in signing this paper."

Lincoln realized that slavery could not return after the war. He agreed that his "war measure" would have to be made permanent for the entire country by a constitutional amendment. Therefore, he quickly supported action in Congress that

led to the 13th Amendment.

Thus, Lincoln changed both the goals of the war and his own mind about slavery in the United States. The 13th Amendment called for the abolition of slavery immediately in all states and territories without compensation to slave owners.

The question about the future of the freed slaves still bothered Lincoln. In August 1863, he met for the first time with Frederick Douglass, the famous black abolitionist. Douglass pressed Lincoln to end the Union policy of paying black soldiers only half the rate of white soldiers. Douglass insisted on equal rights for all Americans, white and black, men and women.

The Gettysburg Address

Following the horrific battle at Gettysburg in July 1863, the committee in charge of organizing the dedication of the battlefield cemetery invited Lincoln to make "a few appropriate remarks." Lincoln put considerable thought into writing his speech before he arrived at Gettysburg for the ceremonies on November 19, 1863.

Edward Everett, a former president of Harvard, U.S. senator, and governor of Massachusetts, delivered the main oration that took two hours. Lincoln spoke for two minutes. “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” Lincoln began by dating the origin of American democracy, something unique to the world, with the Declaration of Independence.

He went on to observe that “a great civil war” was testing whether the United States or any democracy “can long endure.” After honoring those who fought and died at Gettysburg, Lincoln said it was for the living to finish “the great task before us.” This was nothing less than making sure democracy itself would survive on American soil:

. . . that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address

In 1864, Lincoln faced re-election. Some proposed that Lincoln suspend the presidential election while the war still raged. Lincoln dismissed this idea:

We cannot have free governments without elections, and if the rebellion could force us to forego, or postpone a national election, it might fairly claim to have already conquered and ruined us.

In the Election of 1864, the Democrats pushed for an armistice with the Confederacy to stop the unrelenting bloodshed. Lincoln, however, stood firm for ending the war only on his terms: reunification of the nation without slavery. The voters agreed with Lincoln.

As the Union military victory neared in the spring of 1865, many called for vengeance against the South. There was great anticipation about what Lincoln would say about this at his Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865. Among the 30,000 people who gathered before the steps of the Capitol to hear Lincoln speak were many black Union soldiers.

This may have been Lincoln’s most religious speech. “Woe unto the world because of offenses” that God “wills to remove,” he said. Lincoln believed that 250 years of slavery was one of these offenses for which

both the North and South were responsible. This “terrible war” was the cost of removing it, he declared. God yet may require the war to continue, Lincoln warned, “until every drop of blood drawn by the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword.”

Lincoln ended with a plea to heal the nation: “With malice toward none; with charity for all.” He called for all Americans to “bind up the nation’s wounds” and “do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”

About a month later, on April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee surrendered. A few days later, John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln. When Lincoln died the next day, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton remarked, “Now he belongs to the ages.”

For Discussion and Writing

1. If Lincoln had not been assassinated, do you think he would have pushed for equal civil and political rights for black people? Explain.
2. Some argue today that Lincoln saved democracy itself for the world. What words from his speeches indicate he was attempting to do this?
3. What do you think was Lincoln’s greatest speech? Why?

For Further Reading

Gienapp, William, ed. *The Fiery Trial, The Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Lind, Michael. *What Lincoln Believed, The Values and Convictions of America’s Greatest President*. New York: Doubleday, 2005.

A C T I V I T Y

What Is Most Important About American Democracy?

1. Assume that you are a foreign-exchange student in another country. The students there ask you to give a speech explaining the most important things you think they should know about American democracy.
2. In writing your speech, consider such things as U.S. history, constitutional rights, equality, system of government, education, capitalism, race, religion, opportunity, or anything else you believe is important.
3. Deliver your speech and invite questions about what you said.

St. Thomas Aquinas, Natural Law, and the Common Good

St. Thomas Aquinas, a medieval Roman Catholic scholar, reconciled the political philosophy of Aristotle with Christian faith. In doing so, he contended that a just ruler or government must work for the “common good” of all.

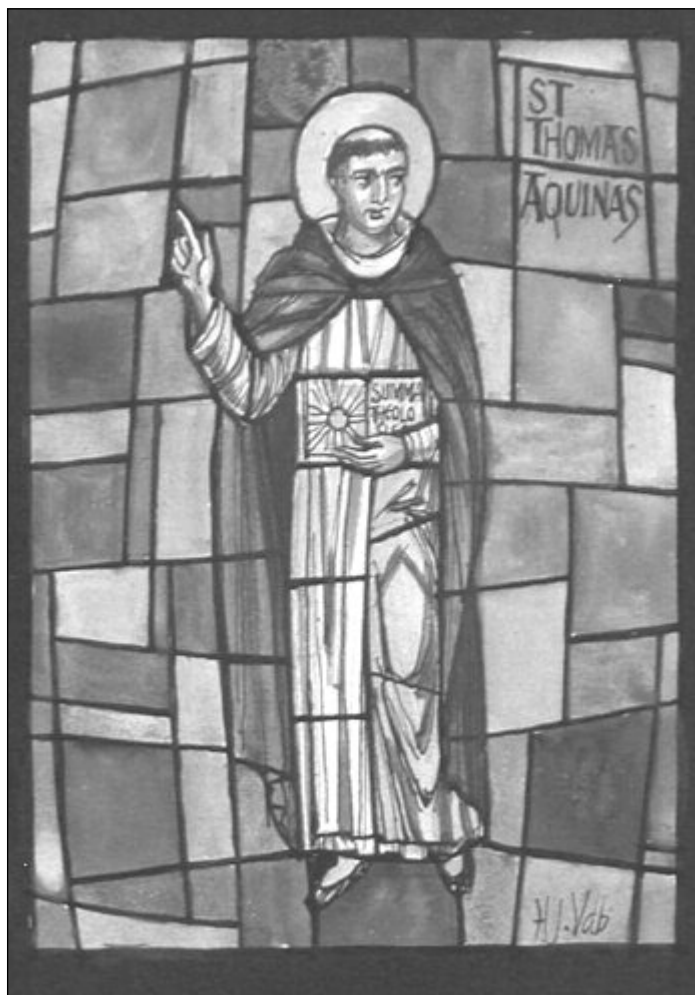
Before the time of Jesus, the Greeks developed concepts about how the world worked and human beings behaved. Aristotle, who died in 322 B.C., was an Athenian philosopher who wrote about science, ethics, politics, and almost every other realm of knowledge.

Throughout his writings, Aristotle did not teach that the Greek gods or religion controlled the world and its people. Instead, his observations led him to conclude that nature was purposeful and driven by natural laws that human reason could discover. These natural laws provided a way to explain the world and the place of humans within it.

In one of Aristotle’s works called *The Politics*, he reasoned, “man is by nature a political animal.” By this, he meant that people were naturally destined to live in groups, which required some sort of ruler or government. According to Aristotle, only by living in a community “to secure the good life” could human beings achieve such virtues as courage, honesty, and justice. In his time, this human community was a city-state like Athens.

Applying his scientific method of observation and analysis of evidence, Aristotle studied the governments of 158 city-states in the Greek world. He classified rule by a king (monarchy) and the superior few (aristocracy) as “good” governments. He judged rule by the few rich (oligarchy) and the many poor (democracy) as “bad” governments.

Aristotle concluded that the best government was one that “mixed” the features of oligarchy and democracy. For example, all the citizens would choose some government officials by lottery. But only some citizens with a certain amount of property or wealth could qualify for other offices. Aristotle thought this form of government provided the best chance for political stability.



St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) was the most influential thinker of the Middle Ages. (Library of Congress)

Augustine and Christian Faith

Hundreds of years later, Christianity emerged as the dominant religion in the Roman Empire. The fathers of the early Christian Church introduced a way of explaining the world far different from that of Aristotle. Perhaps the most important of these early church fathers was St. Augustine.

Augustine was born in A.D. 354 in North Africa, then a province of Rome. As a youth, he studied the concepts of natural law and human reason from the writings of classic Greek and Roman thinkers like Aristotle and Cicero. Augustine converted to Christianity when he was 33.

He became a Christian priest and bishop of the North African city of Hippo. For a while, he believed reason and faith were compatible. By the year 400, however, he had changed his mind. “Do not therefore try to understand in order that you may believe,” he wrote, “but believe in order that you may understand.”

Augustine taught that when Adam and Eve put their own desires above God's will, they committed a sin that became the source of evil among human beings. Christians often call this "original sin." Augustine believed that all human beings were born with original sin and were thus doomed to damnation. But like other Christians, he also believed that God was merciful and sent Jesus to save believers from sin and eternal suffering.

Even so, Augustine viewed humans as essentially sinful. Only some of them would escape from the fires of hell. These individuals, known only to God, would achieve heavenly bliss in what Augustine called the "City of God." Membership in the Christian (Roman Catholic) church was essential, he wrote, but even that did not guarantee salvation.

Because of Adam and Eve's sinfulness, government was needed to control and punish sinful humans. Augustine said that government forms were not important since they were all temporary.

Augustine argued that people should obey their rulers unless they violated God's word. In that case, believers could refuse to obey, but must expect punishment. In general, though, he advised that it was better to endure a wicked state during one's brief existence on Earth, having faith that eternal life awaited in the City of God.

Augustine died in 430 as barbarians assaulted Hippo, heralding the end of the Roman Empire. Later, the Roman Catholic Church made him a saint. St. Augustine's writings helped develop Catholic Church beliefs.

Thomas Aquinas Combined Reason and Faith

Nearly 2,000 years after Aristotle died, only a few of his works on logic survived in Western Europe. But Jewish and Muslim scholars had preserved much of his writing. Starting in the 1100s, scholars in the West began to translate Aristotle's works from Hebrew and Arabic into Latin, making them available in the new universities that were forming. Along with these translations came extensive commentaries on Aristotle such as those by the Spanish Muslim scholar Averroes.

The rediscovery of Aristotle's works with their sophisticated explanation of the world based on natural law and reason seemed to challenge the teachings of the Christian faith. At first, the Roman Catholic Church tried to ban his works.

But some church scholars such as Albert the Great at the University of Paris thought it was possible to combine human reason and Christian faith. Thomas Aquinas, an Italian Roman Catholic theologian (religious scholar), devoted his life to this task.

Aquinas was born in 1225, the son of a noble family in the kingdom of Sicily, which included part of the mainland of Italy around Naples. His family sent him at age 5 to the Benedictine monastery of Monte Casino to train as a monk.

Later, Aquinas attended the University of Naples where he first encountered the writings of Aristotle. Against his family's wishes, he joined the Dominican order at 18, taking a vow of poverty.

In 1245, Aquinas traveled to the University of Paris where a great debate was going on about Aristotle's ideas. The young Aquinas studied under Albert the Great who sided with those who believed Aristotle's view of the world was compatible with that of Christianity.

Aquinas came to think that one should believe only what is self-evident (e.g., human beings use reason) or can be deduced from self-evident propositions (e.g., human reason can discover truth).

Aquinas became a Dominican teacher of religion at the University of Paris and in Italy. He continued to study the works of Aristotle and the Muslim commentaries on them.

Aquinas wrote his own commentaries on Aristotle, which included reasoned propositions based on certainties revealed by God. He also wrote summaries of Catholic doctrine that also attempted to combine reason and faith.

Natural and Human Law

Thomas Aquinas, much like Aristotle, wrote that nature is organized for good purposes. Unlike Aristotle, however, Aquinas went on to say that God created nature and rules the world by "divine reason."

Aquinas described four kinds of law. **Eternal law** was God's perfect plan, not fully knowable to humans. It determined the way things such as animals and planets behaved and how people *should* behave. **Divine law**, primarily from the Bible, guided individuals beyond the world to "eternal happiness" in what St. Augustine had called the "City of God."

(Continued on next page)

Aquinas wrote most extensively about **natural law**. He stated, “the light of reason is placed by nature [and thus by God] in every man to guide him in his acts.” Therefore, human beings, alone among God’s creatures, use reason to lead their lives. This is natural law.

The master principle of natural law, wrote Aquinas, was that “good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided.” Aquinas stated that reason reveals particular natural laws that are good for humans such as self-preservation, marriage and family, and the desire to know God. Reason, he taught, also enables humans to understand things that are evil such as adultery, suicide, and lying.

While natural law applied to all humans and was unchanging, **human law** could vary with time, place, and circumstance. Aquinas defined this last type of law as “an ordinance of reason for the common good” made and enforced by a ruler or government. He warned, however, that people were not bound to obey laws made by humans that conflicted with natural law.

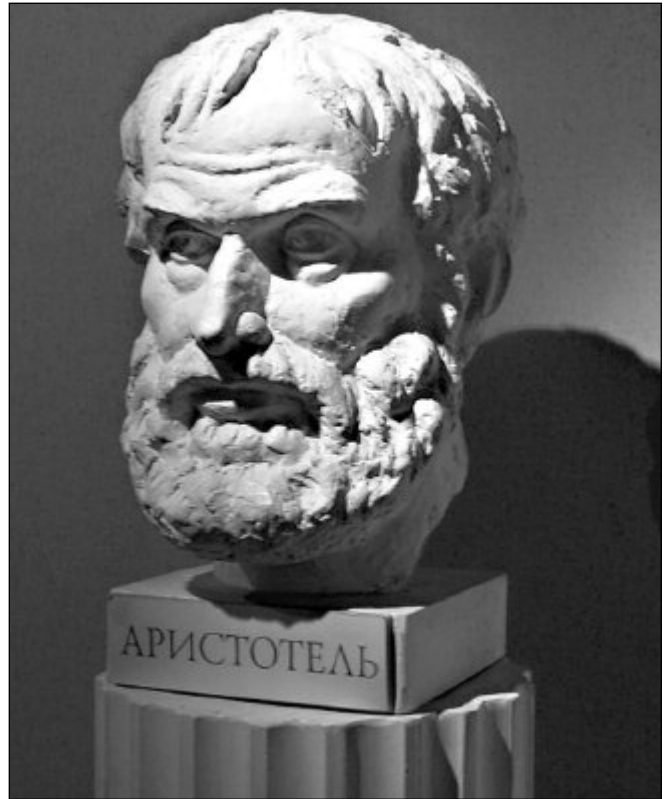
Government and the “Common Good”

In 1267, Thomas Aquinas completed a work on government inspired by Aristotle’s *Politics*. Aquinas asserted, “Yet it is natural for man, more than any other animal, to be a social and political animal, to live in a group.” He presented logical proofs of this such as the self-evident fact of human speech to allow individuals to reason with one another.

Aquinas further observed that people tend to look only after their own self-interest. “Therefore,” he concluded, “in every multitude there must be some governing power” to direct people toward the “common good.”

Thus, Aquinas did not agree with St. Augustine that the main purpose of government was simply to keep the sinful in line. Aquinas saw government as also helping to work for the “common good” that benefits all. The common good included such things as protecting life, preserving the state, and promoting the peace. Aristotle would have called this “the good life.”

Aquinas addressed the problem of unjust rulers who might be a king, the few rich, or the many poor. Aquinas noted that when rulers make laws that violate natural law, they become “tyrants.” Aquinas went on to conclude, “A tyrannical government is not just, because it is directed not to the common good, but to the private good of the ruler, as the Philosopher [Aristotle] says.”



Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) was the student of Plato, who was the student of Socrates. These three were the greatest philosophers of the ancient world. (Phil Sign/iStockphoto.com)

What should the people do about a tyranny? Aquinas agreed with St. Augustine that the subjects of unjust rule are not obliged to obey the laws since they are not legitimate. But Aquinas went far beyond St. Augustine and virtually all other medieval thinkers on this matter.

Aquinas argued that the subjects of a tyranny, acting as a “public authority,” might rebel and depose it. Aquinas cautioned that the people should not do this hastily, but only when the damage done by the tyranny exceeds what may occur in a rebellion. This was one of the first justifications for revolution in Western thought.

Aquinas further developed the meaning of “just war” that had been discussed by the Roman statesman Cicero and by St. Augustine. For a war to be just, there must be these three conditions:

1. A declaration by the ruler to defend the “common good” against enemies.
2. A “just cause” for an attack on an enemy “because they deserve it on account of some fault” such as avenging wrongs they have committed.
3. A “rightful intention” to advance good or avoid evil such as punishing evil-doers and not simply grabbing land or goods.

These conditions for a “just war” later influenced the development of international laws of war.

Aquinas wrote thoughtfully about the best form of government. He, like Aristotle, preferred a mixture of government forms. Aquinas recognized the value of a king, “a shepherd seeking the common good of the multitude.” But he opposed an absolute monarch.

The nobility, Aquinas argued, should advise the king and limit his power. Furthermore, the king’s laws must result from the “deliberation of reason” and have the consent of both the nobility and the common people. These were radical ideas for a time when kings claimed no one but God could hold them accountable.

The Legacy of St. Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas spent his last years teaching and writing in Italy. He died in 1274 at age 49 from an illness he developed while walking to France to attend a church conference.

At first, the Roman Catholic Church rejected Aquinas’ massive effort to reconcile human reason with Christian faith. In 1277, the church condemned some of his writings based on Aristotle’s ideas. About 50 years after his death, however, the church revived his works and made him a saint.

The writings of St. Thomas Aquinas combining reason and faith became the basis for official Roman Catholic doctrine (known as “Thomism”). In addition, his forward-looking political ideas regarding natural law, unjust rulers, and rebellion influenced European Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke and even Americans such as Thomas Jefferson and Martin Luther King.

For Discussion and Writing

1. How did Aristotle and St. Augustine differ in their views about the natural world and government?
2. Do you agree with St. Thomas Aquinas’ three conditions for a “just war”? Explain.
3. How do you think the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas may have influenced Thomas Jefferson and Martin Luther King?

For Further Reading

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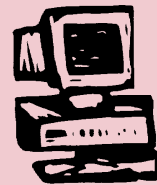
A C T I V I T Y

The “Common Good”

1. Form small groups to discuss and list five laws, policies, or programs the U.S. government should enact for the “common good” of all Americans.
2. The groups should then rank their five government acts from most to least important.
3. Each group then should read its ranked list to the rest of the class and defend its first choice for the “common good.”

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Standards Addressed

Stem Cell

National High School U. S. History Standard 31: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in the contemporary United States. (3) Understands how the rise of religious groups and movements influenced political issues in contemporary American society (e.g., the position of major religious groups on such issues as abortion, gay rights, women in the clergy, and educational issues . . .). (5) Understands major contemporary social issues and the groups involved. . . .

National High School Civics Standard 21: Understands the formation and implementation of public policy. (1) Knows a public policy issue at the local, state, or national level well enough to identify the major groups interested in that issue and explain their respective positions. (4) Understands why agreements may be difficult or impossible on issues such as abortion because of conflicts about values, principles, and interests.

California History-Social Science Content Standard 11.11: Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

California History-Social Science Content Standard 12.7: Students analyze and compare the powers and procedures of the national, state, tribal, and local governments. (5) Explain how public policy is formed, including the setting of the public agenda and implementation of it through regulations and executive orders.

Lincoln

National High School U.S. History Standard 13: Understands the causes of the Civil War. (1) Understands the reasons for the disruption of the second American party system and how this led to the ascent of the Republican party in the 1850s. (2) Understands events that fueled the political and sectional conflicts over slavery and ultimately polarized the North and South (e.g., the Missouri Compromise, the Wilmot Proviso, the Kansas-Nebraska Act).

National High School U.S. History Standard 14: Understands the course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people. (2) Understands the influence of Abraham Lincoln's ideas on the Civil War (e.g., the Gettysburg Address, how the Emancipation Proclamation transformed the goals of the Civil War).

California History-Social Science Content Standard 8.9: Students analyze the early and steady attempts to abolish slavery and to realize the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. (5) Analyze the significance of the States' Rights Doctrine, the Missouri Compromise (1820), the Wilmot Proviso (1846), the Compromise of 1850, Henry Clay's role in the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), the Dred Scott v. Sandford decision (1857), and the Lincoln Douglas debates (1858).

California History-Social Science Content Standard 8.10: Students analyze the multiple causes, key events, and complex consequences of the Civil War. (4) Discuss Abraham Lincoln's presidency and his significant writings and speeches and their relationship to the Declaration of Independence, such as his "House Divided" speech (1858), Gettysburg Address (1863), Emancipation Proclamation (1863), and inaugural addresses (1861 and 1865).

Aquinas

National High School World History Standard 8: Understands how Aegean civilization emerged and how interrelations developed among peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean and Southwest Asia from 600 to 200 BCE. (2) Knows significant Greek writings, literature, and mythology (e.g., the prominent ideas of Greek philosophers . . .).

National High School World History Standard 20: Understands the redefinition of European society and culture from 1000 to 1300 CE. (5) Understands the spread of philosophy to Europe (e.g., the importance of the Islamic states of Iberia and Sicily as well as the Byzantine Empire in transmitting scientific and philosophical knowledge to Western and Central Europe; how classical works such as those of Aristotle and Plato became part of medieval philosophy in Western Europe, and the attitude of the Church toward these non-Christian philosophies).

California History-Social Science Content Standard 6.4: Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Ancient Greece. (8) Describe the enduring contributions of important Greek figures in the arts and sciences (e.g., . . . Aristotle . . .).

California History-Social Science Content Standard 7.6: Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Medieval Europe. (8) Understand the importance of the Catholic church as a political, intellectual, and aesthetic institution (e.g., . . . St. Thomas Aquinas's synthesis of classical philosophy with Christian theology, and the concept of "natural law").

California History-Social Science Content Standard 10.1: Students relate the moral and ethical principles in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, in Judaism, and in Christianity to the development of Western political thought. (2) Trace the development of the Western political ideas of the rule of law and illegitimacy of tyranny, using selections from Plato's Republic and Aristotle's Politics.

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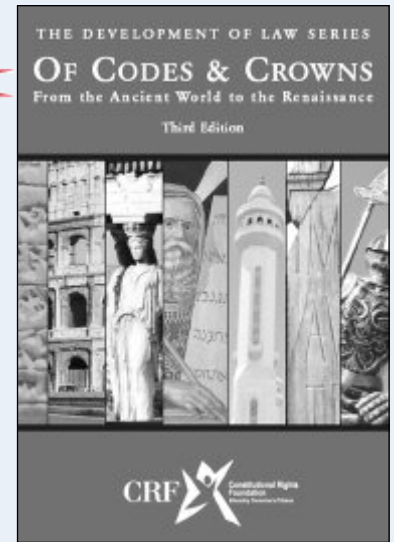
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