

## Stem cell research, abortion and the 'soul of the embryo'?

Wednesday, 13 February 2013

Duration: 21:14

<b>GCSE</b>	
AQA	Religious Studies A: Unit 2 Religious Studies B: Unit 2
Edexcel	Religious Studies Units 1-7
OCR	Religious Studies A: B604 Religious Studies B: B603
WJEC	Religious Studies A: Units 1, 3, 6-8 Religious Studies B: Unit 2
<b>A level</b>	
AQA	Religious Studies: AS Unit C, A2 Unit 3A
Edexcel	Religious Studies: Units 1-4
OCR	Religious Studies: Unit G572
WJEC	Religious Studies: RS 1/2 CS

This is a Faith debate featuring Abdul Majid Katme, David Albert Jones, Gerard Hughes, John Harris and Linda Woodhead. It focuses on stem cell research and abortion.

The poll carried out prior to the debate shows that an increasing majority of people in the UK are in support of abortion:

YouGov <i>Those in favour of:</i>	2005	2011	2012	2013
Raising or retaining 24 week limit	29	42	39	46
Reducing the 24 week limit	43	37	37	28
Banning abortions altogether	12	6	6	7
Don't know	16	15	17	19

Students could be given the same questions as used in this poll and others which can be found in the pdf (see below) and asked to vote on them prior to watching the debate, revisiting them later to see if any of the views expressed had caused them to change their minds.

All the people polled were 18+ so it could be worth comparing both the initial and final views of students with the YouGov results to see if there are any indications that young people, possibly more 'modern' in their outlook, give very different answers to the questions.

This programme is suitable for use with A level and GCSE students studying ethics, medical ethics, religion and science and sexual ethics.

The debate is suitable for high-performing GCSE students though may need explanation.

A projected summary and conclusion of the statistics produced is:

- There are essentially two groups
  - Pro-life anti-abortionists
    - Bare life
  - Pro-life pro-abortionists
    - Fulfilled life
- Not a religious / secular issue, but between two competing understandings of 'life'

The debate focuses mainly on the question of when life begins. The distinction drawn here is between a human being and a human person. It is argued that the foetus becomes a human being and is recognisable as such but does not become a human person until it is able to function as a person with related senses etc. There is some discussion of ensoulment from a Muslim viewpoint. Questions are also raised about abortion following rape, a pregnancy which can harm the mother and also a foetus which is known to have severe disabilities or other conditions which may seriously limit its quality of life.

The law on stem cell research is also discussed and to what extent it could or should be changed.

After watching the discussion, it is worth returning to the students' views to find out if and how their personal opinions have been influenced or changed by what they have heard. For extension work students might consider how these ideas might affect different Christian denominations e.g. Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

For 6th formers it might well be possible to watch the discussion straight through, however, for younger students it might be advisable to watch each segment at a time (there are clear breaks between each part). After discussion, it would then be worth watching the two-minute summary to clarify and crystalize the thoughts and views expressed.

A pdf of the statistics used (which can be turned into a PowerPoint) is available on the webpage under resources.