Why It Is Morally Right to Take the COVID Vaccine

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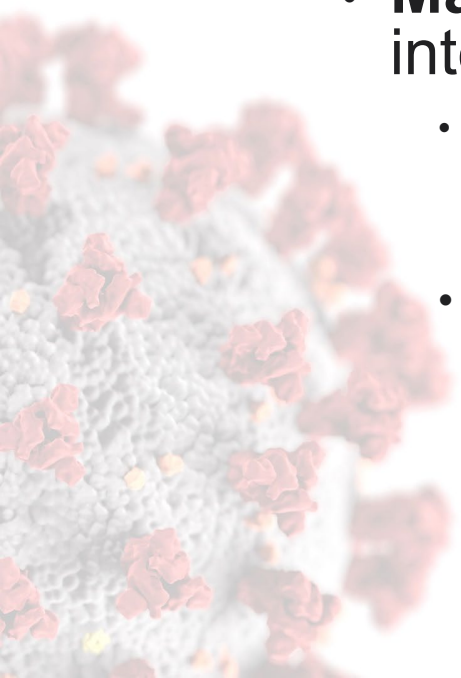
The Catholic University of America

CRUCIAL FACTS

- HEK 293 and Per.C6 are immortal cell lines – they reproduce indefinitely
- Using them does *not* create demand for new fetal tissue or new cell lines
- HEK 293 is one of the most commonly-used cell lines in basic science research (accounts for ~85% of PubMed citations).
- It is nearly impossible to do research without at least using products made from HEK 293 – i.e. commonly used molecular reagents, etc.
- HEK 293 is involved in the development, production or testing of countless products, including medications, processed foods and beauty products.

WHY WAS IT WRONG TO CREATE THE CELL LINES?

- Proper consent was lacking

- The researchers *may* have cooperated with abortion providers in order to procure the tissue (though they didn't for HEK 293)

- The prospect of using the tissue for research *may* be used by the abortion provider or the mother to assuage their consciences/rationalize their action

- **Important to remember**: the decision to abort has nothing to do with the prospect of using the tissue for research
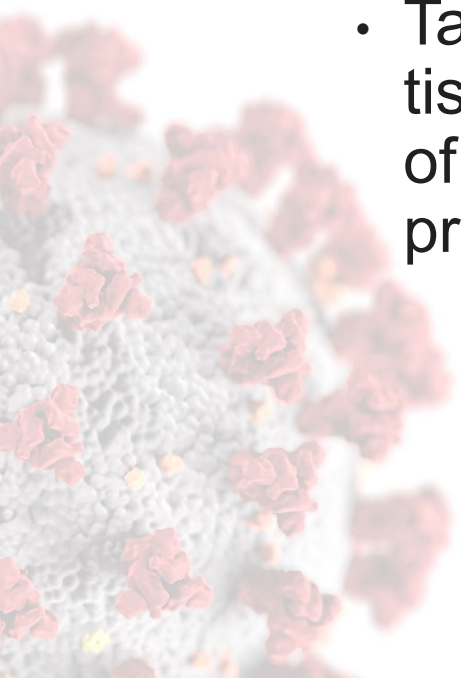
COOPERATION WITH EVIL

- **Cooperation with evil** = contributing to someone else's evil action
  - **Formal cooperation** = contributing to the evil while sharing the evil intention
    - E.g. donating to Planned Parenthood with the goal of facilitating abortions
    - Always morally wrong
  - **Material cooperation** = contributing to the evil without sharing the evil intention
    - E.g. investing in a company that donates to Planned Parenthood (without intending to facilitate abortions); working in a hospital in which abortions are performed
    - **Moral assessment depends on**:
      - How direct is my contribution to the evil?
      - Is there a proportionate reason?
      - Is the cooperation likely to cause scandal?
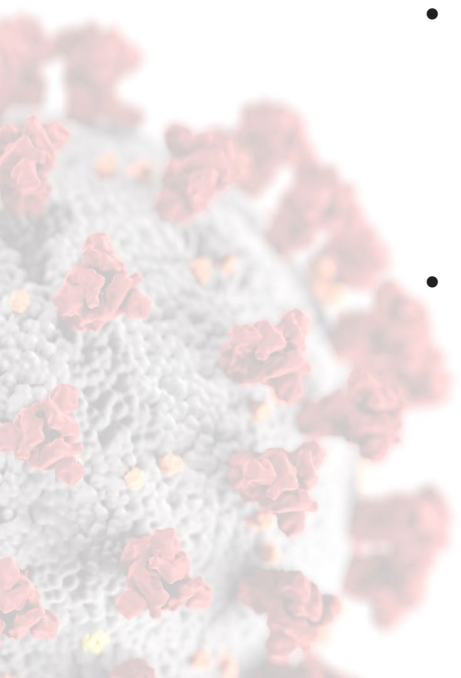
COOPERATION WITH EVIL?

*Taking the COVID vaccines **does not** involve cooperation with evil strictly speaking*

- The evil (i.e. the use of aborted fetal tissue without proper consent and perhaps cooperation with abortion) happened in the past and nothing we do today can change what happened
- Taking the vaccines does not create demand for more aborted fetal tissue, so it also does not constitute cooperation with the ongoing evil of cooperating with and compensating abortion providers in order to procure fetal tissue for research

A BETTER FRAMEWORK: APPROPRIATION

- Appropriation of the fruits of evil = benefitting from past evil
- Taking the vaccine **does** involve appropriation
- **Ethical Concerns With Appropriation**:
  - **Ratification**: approving of the past evil from which you are benefitting
    - Always wrong
  - **Corruption of character** (desensitization/seepage): benefitting from the evil may desensitize you to it or lessen the firmness of your moral opposition to it
    - A proportionate reason is required to accept these risks
  - **Scandal**: Will my appropriation be reasonably interpreted as implying ratification?

APPLYING THE APPROPRIATION FRAMEWORK

- **Ratification?**
  - **No**. One can take the vaccine without approving of how the cell lines used to make the vaccine were derived.
- **Risks to Moral Character?**
  - **Low**. The vaccines are far removed from the original evil. And the original evil - i.e. the possible cooperation with abortion and lack of proper consent in obtaining the tissue to create the cell lines – is itself already one step removed from the abortion itself.
  - But it is still important to make the effort not to be desensitized to the use of aborted fetal tissue in research and to promote ethical alternatives.
- **Proportionate reason?**
  - **Yes**. Vaccination is not just for private benefit but is a duty for the common good. It is crucial to achieving herd immunity, limiting illness and death, restoring economic and social life, etc.
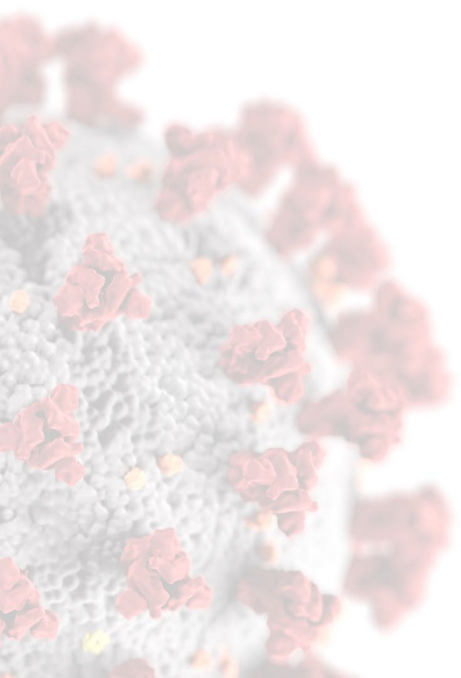- **Scandal?**
  - **Not reasonable.**
  - The real risk is that unreasonable refusal of pro-lifers to be vaccinated will *undermine* the credibility of the pro-life movement.

PUTTING THE ISSUE IN PERSPECTIVE: *ANALOGOUS CASES*

- Medical knowledge and treatments: many originally derived from seriously unethical experiments, including Nazi experiments on those in concentration camps
  - e.g. chloroquine, Retin-A, knowledge of human anatomy
- Land – much of the land we now use was unjustly taken from Native Americans
- Railroads – most of the railroads in the south were built by slaves
- Receiving an organ transplant from a murder victim
- Buying almost any processed food or using almost any pharmaceutical product – most made use of HEK 293 at some stage

PUTTING THE ISSUE IN PERSPECTIVE: *DAILY COOPERATION WITH EVIL*

- Buying products made with slave labor: rice, coffee, roses, chocolate, clothing, carpets, etc.

- Buying products from companies that donate to Planned Parenthood

- Investing in any large index fund – all have significant shares in companies that donate to planned parenthood, conduct research on human embryos, etc.

- Paying taxes

CONCLUSION

- **Crucial Facts:**
  - The connection between the COVID vaccines and abortion is extremely indirect.
  - Taking the vaccine does *not* perpetuate the evil of abortion or even the (lesser) evil of using aborted fetal tissue for research.
- **Evaluation of Moral Dangers in Light of the Facts:**
  - Cooperation: Taking the vaccine involves **no cooperation** with evil.
    - Even if it did, that cooperation would be extremely remote – more remote than many other common actions – and pro-lifers can make much better use of their limited resources on other fronts.
  - Appropriation: Taking the vaccine does not imply approval of abortion or involve a significant risk of desensitization to abortion.
- **Overall Moral Evaluation**
  - Because taking the vaccine is not inherently evil, it all comes down to proportionality.
  - Herd immunity requires widespread vaccination; is crucial for the common good.
  - The moral reasons to refuse the vaccine are weak; the reasons to take it are strong.
  - **Taking the vaccine is the right thing to do.**