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The perils of research

YOUR paper's recent embryo research publicity was misleading. These researchers are not preventing handicap. They merely destroy any embryos thought handicapped.

Ethically this is not an alternative to abortion. It does not prevent handicaps arising in present or future generations. It offers no treatments for children or adults with disabilities.

The only research projects seeking genuine cures for genetic diseases are being done in other medical spheres and are making advances without destroying embryos.

Tragically, in vitro fertilisation (IVF) can cause handicaps. This is admitted by the research licensing authority. Disorders noted in test-tube babies by childbirth statisticians include spina bifida, Down's Syndrome and defects of brain, heart or lung.

Some disorders and IVF failures result from "fertility drugs" which can cause embryos to develop abnormally or be miscarried, and may even cause cancer in the woman.

Embryo research cannot repair childless couples' malfunctioning reproductive systems. After 25 years' research IVF still has a 90 per cent failure rate.

Alternatives such as tubal surgery or transfer of the egg to the womb for natural conception are available.

Parliament should act now to ensure that infertile couples obtain the help they need, without destruction of embryonic life. It is precisely because embryos are human beings that researchers wish to experiment on them — and human beings need protection, not vivisection.

JOHN SMEATON, General Secretary, The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, Tufton Street, London.