



The Theocentric Identity of the Human Embryo in Confronting the Challenge of Abortion: An Analysis Based on the Qur'anic Verses*

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Abstract

The identity of the human embryo as a human being has become the subject of fundamental challenges in the contemporary era due to remarkable advances in biotechnology. Rooted in the political, economic, and cultural discourses of modern societies, these challenges have reduced the embryo's identity to such notions as objectification, viewing it merely as biological tissue, a commercial commodity, or a part of the mother's body lacking independent existence. The present study seeks to reinterpret the identity of the embryo through the theocentric worldview of the Holy Qur'an. Employing a descriptive-analytical approach, it addresses the following fundamental question: What are the essential components of the embryo's theocentric identity from the perspective of the Qur'an, and how can these components

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provide both theoretical and practical responses to modern bioethical challenges? The Holy Qur'an elaborates on the stages of embryonic creation in numerous verses. A systematic analysis of these verses reveals a set of enduring principles, including the principle of divine creation, the principle of divine ownership, the principle of purposiveness in creation, the principle of the infusion of the divine spirit, the principle of inherent human dignity, and the principle of the sanctity of human life. Collectively, these principles establish the embryo as an entity possessing an independent identity. The findings demonstrate that these six foundational principles provide a coherent and well-substantiated framework for addressing the contemporary challenge of abortion.

Keywords

Embryonic Identity, Modern Bioethical Challenges, Theocentric Identity, the Holy Qur'an.

Introduction

Over recent decades, the human embryo has become the focal point of extensive bioethical, jurisprudential, and legal debates. Scientific breakthroughs, including the discovery of stem cells, cloning technologies, surrogacy, and prenatal diagnosis of congenital abnormalities, have offered unprecedented opportunities for treating incurable diseases and providing hope to infertile families. At the same time, however, emerging legal and ethical paradigms, shaped by humanism, secular thought, and feminist movements, have challenged the identity of the embryo by raising the question: Does the embryo possess an independent human identity endowed with inherent dignity from the very beginning of its existence? Such perspectives have weakened legal and moral protections for the embryo and have increasingly facilitated the legalization and justification of abortion.

Within the dominant discourse of modern biomedicine, the embryo is frequently reduced either to "A collection of undifferentiated cells" or regarded as an entity whose identity is entirely contingent upon the "Rights of the mother" or the "Agreement of the parents." These reductionist conceptions stand in sharp contrast to the rich theocentric anthropology of the Qur'an, which emphasizes the authenticity, intrinsic dignity, and purposeful creation of the human being. The central issue, therefore, is whether a coherent theory of embryonic identity can be derived from the Qur'anic teachings, one that is both compatible with established scientific knowledge and capable of addressing emerging bioethical challenges.

The primary objective of this study is to identify the fundamental components of the embryo's theocentric identity based on Qur'anic verses and subsequently evaluate the effectiveness of these components in confronting modern bioethical issues, with particular emphasis on abortion. Previous studies have generally concentrated either on

jurisprudential discussions, primarily based on traditions concerning the ensoulment, or on scientific analyses grounded in embryological findings. At the same time, relatively little attention has been devoted to a direct Qur'anic examination of embryonic identity. This gap underscores the necessity of investigating the Qur'anic discourse on this issue.

Moreover, contemporary bioethical challenges are predominantly grounded in non-religious conceptions of the embryo. In such an intellectual context, presenting a theocentric model firmly rooted in the Qur'anic text, one that recognizes the embryo as possessing an independent identity, can provide a robust foundation for protecting embryonic life and constitutes an indispensable contribution to Islamic bioethics.

Accordingly, employing a descriptive-analytical methodology, this study seeks to answer the following question: From the perspective of the Qur'an, what are the principal components of the embryo's theocentric identity, and how can they respond to modern bioethical challenges?

The conceptual framework adopted in this study is based upon a coherent system of well-established Qur'anic principles that simultaneously emphasize two fundamental dimensions of existence. The first concerns the divine dimension of creation, which can be theoretically explained through the three principles of Divine Creatorship, God's Absolute Ownership, and the Purposefulness of Creation. The second pertains to the human dimension, manifested through such concepts as the infusion of the divine spirit, inherent ontological dignity, and the sanctity of human life. The convergence of these divine and human dimensions forms a coherent and comprehensive identity framework for the embryo, providing substantial

theological and ethical grounds for safeguarding embryonic life against contemporary challenges, particularly the rapidly increasing phenomenon of abortion.

Research conducted on the human embryo has generally fallen into two broad categories. The first comprises jurisprudential studies focusing on abortion and its legal consequences, particularly compensation. Among these is the study by (Nikzad & Joursaraei, 2014) entitled "An Examination of Abortion from a Jurisprudential Perspective," which offers a comprehensive analysis of the jurisprudential and hadith-based dimensions of abortion and emphasizes that the prohibition of abortion may admit exceptions in cases of severe hardship. Nevertheless, its treatment of the Qur'anic foundations of embryonic dignity requires further development.

Similarly, (Keramati et al, 2018) investigated the jurisprudential foundations for the permissibility of abortion with particular emphasis on the legal principle of conflict between competing obligations. While their study successfully systematizes the views of Imami jurists regarding the prioritization of the mother's life over that of the embryo, it pays little attention to the psychological and social dimensions associated with the application of this principle.

A second group of studies has addressed the legal aspects of abortion in Iran and in the international arena. An example is (Hariri & Shokrbeygi's, 2022) article, "An Examination of the Process of Abortion in Iranian Law and Imami Jurisprudence with a Comparative Perspective on International Law." Although this comparative study provides a relatively comprehensive examination of Iranian law, Imami jurisprudence, and international legal instruments, its analysis of certain jurisprudential evidence, particularly concerning the permissibility of abortion after ensoulment, appears overly simplified.

Likewise, the study "A Comparative Study of Abortion Laws around the World" by (Rostami et al, 2013) examines the problem of abortion and its legal challenges in different countries, particularly those with large populations. While the article provides a comprehensive survey of the abortion laws of various jurisdictions and offers a clear picture of global legal approaches, it does not sufficiently explore the jurisprudential foundations of these laws or their adaptation to the Iranian legal system. Similarly, the article by (Taheri et al, 2022) entitled "Identifying the Jurisprudential Foundations of Criminal Punishment for Offenses Against the Fetus in Sunni and Shi'a Jurisprudence" presents a careful analysis of the evidence supporting retaliation and blood money in both schools of Islamic law and effectively explains the differences of opinion among jurists. Nevertheless, its critique of the arguments advanced by proponents of retaliation does not sufficiently employ principles of Islamic legal theory.

In addition, (Rezvani Mofrad & Nourahmadi ,2022), in their article "An Examination of the Time of Ensoulment in the Human Embryo with Emphasis on the Verses of the Holy Qur'an," employ a descriptive-analytical methodology, drawing upon Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions to investigate the timing of ensoulment. Their study convincingly emphasizes the fourth month of pregnancy as the legal presumption for ensoulment; however, it does not address the practical application of this conclusion within statutory law or the challenges associated with its implementation.

Taken together, although these studies make valuable contributions to the literature, they generally do not address the issue at its most fundamental level. The present study, while complementing previous scholarship, seeks to provide a stable theoretical foundation

for addressing the issue of abortion by formulating a Qur'an-based identity framework for the human embryo. By identifying the embryo's essential identity principles from the Qur'anic perspective and applying them to contemporary bioethical issues, this study aims to reduce the existing conceptual uncertainty surrounding the protection of embryonic life.

1. The Concept of the Embryo

In examining the embryo's theocentric identity, it is first necessary to clarify what the Qur'anic worldview means by the term "Embryo." The Arabic word "*Janīn*" is derived from the triliteral root (j-n-n), whose primary meaning is "To conceal" or "To cover." (Ibn Fāris, 1983, vol. 1, p. 421) Anything hidden from human sight is described by the expression "*Junna 'Anka*." Likewise, "*Janna al-Janīnu*" signifies that the embryo has entered the womb and become concealed (Ibn Manẓūr, n.d., vol. 13, p. 92). From the same linguistic root derive the words "Jinn," referring to beings hidden from human perception, and *janīn*, denoting a child concealed within its mother's womb (Farāhīdī, 1988, vol. 6, p. 21). Although "*Janīn*" follows the morphological pattern "*Fa'īl*," it functions semantically in the passive sense (*Maḍ'ūl*), referring to the child in the mother's womb until birth (Rāghib Iṣḥānī, 1991, p. 204).

Although the noun "*Janīn*" does not appear independently in the Qur'an, the verse, "When you were embryos in your mothers' wombs," (al-Najm, 32) clearly refers to the embryo as a human being residing in the womb. This verse constitutes the first textual indication of the embryo's identity within the Qur'an's theocentric worldview. Moreover, numerous other verses explicitly describe the successive stages of embryonic development and present them as among the signs of God's creative power, as will be discussed below.

2. The Stages of Embryonic Development in the Holy Qur'an

Within the Qur'anic worldview, the embryo is not merely a collection of biological cells but the beginning of a distinct human identity that, from the moment of conception, possesses inherent dignity and the right to life. In numerous verses, God recounts the creation of humankind, from clay, then from a drop of fluid, and subsequently through successive stages of embryonic development within a secure abode, namely the womb. Accordingly, the embryo's identity in the Qur'an transcends both a purely linguistic concept and a merely biological phenomenon; from the very outset, it bears intrinsic dignity and the potential for the divine caliphate.

The Holy Qur'an describes, with remarkable precision, the process of human embryonic formation through a sequence of clearly defined developmental stages:

"Indeed, We created man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a drop of fluid in a secure resting place. Then We created the drop into a clinging substance, then We created the clinging substance into a chewed-like lump, then We created the lump into bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, and thereafter We produced him as another creation. So blessed is Allah, the Best of Creators" (al-Mu'minūn, 12-14).

This noble verse outlines six principal stages of embryonic development: "The fertilized drop, the clinging substance, the chewed-like lump, the formation of bones, the covering of the bones with flesh, and finally the another creation." At the conclusion of this developmental sequence, God glorifies Himself by declaring: "So blessed is Allah, the Best of Creators" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996, vol. 14, p. 89).

Commenting on this verse, Makarem Shirazi writes: "How magnificent is this unparalleled manifestation of divine power, which

fashions within the darkness of the womb such a wondrous creation, with all its marvels, from a mere drop of water. Blessed is that knowledge and wisdom which endows such an insignificant being with such immense capacities, talents, and worthiness. Glory be to Him and to His incomparable creation" (Makarem Shirazi, 1995 ,vol. 14, p. 209).

Thus, from the Qur'anic perspective, the embryo possesses an independent, dignified, and purpose-oriented identity and enjoys God's special care from the earliest moments of its existence.

In addition to describing the embryo's morphological development, the Qur'an also refers to the environment in which this development takes place:

"He creates you in your mothers' wombs, creation after creation, within three layers of darkness" (al-Zumar, 6).

According to Qur'anic exegetes, the phrase "Creation after creation" refers to the embryo's gradual developmental process from the stage of the germ until it reaches the stage of "Another creation." (Sadeghi Tehrani, 1986 ,vol. 25, p. 294) The "Three layers of darkness," according to authoritative Qur'anic commentaries and consistent with modern embryological knowledge, refer to the abdominal wall, the uterine wall, and the embryonic (amniotic) sac or membrane (Rezaei Isfahani, 2007, vol. 2, p. 517). This remarkably precise description of the embryo's multilayered protection against external influences demonstrates a striking correspondence between the Qur'anic account and scientific discoveries made many centuries later through empirical research (Dīyāb & Qarqūz, 1983, p. 93).

Ultimately, these verses present a dynamic and developmental account of embryonic identity. This identity begins with the germ and progresses purposefully toward the stage of "Another Creation," understood as the infusion of the soul and the emergence of complete

human identity. Qur'anic exegetes have emphasized that the detailed mention of these developmental stages serves not only as evidence of the Qur'an's scientific precision but also conveys a profound theological message concerning the dignity and noble status of the human being. Accordingly, from the Islamic perspective, the embryo is a being that possesses inherent human dignity from the very beginning of its existence and remains under God's special care throughout its development.

3. The Identity Components of the Embryo in the Qur'an's Theocentric Perspective

The theocentric identity of the human embryo in the Holy Qur'an can be inferred through a systematic examination of the Qur'anic verses concerning human creation. Collectively, these verses establish a coherent and enduring set of principles that portray the embryo as an independent being endowed with inherent dignity and a purposeful existence.

3.1. The Principle of Divine Creation

The first component of the embryo's theocentric identity is that its creation is directly attributed to God. In numerous verses, the Holy Qur'an presents the formation of the human being in the mother's womb not as a merely natural or accidental biological process but as an act of divine creation and origination. As God declares: "He who created death and life..." (al-Mulk, 2).

This verse affirms that both life and death lie entirely within God's will and authority, and that no created being possesses the power either to create life or to bestow death independently. In other words, both the beginning and the end of life depend exclusively upon

the divine will; human beings exercise no independent authority over the creation or termination of life.

Accordingly, from the very moment of its existence, the embryo falls under God's ownership and lordship. Any violation of embryonic life therefore constitutes, in reality, an infringement upon God's sovereign right over human life. God has created the human being as a creature endowed with extraordinary physical and spiritual capacities and with the potential to attain the highest levels of perfection (Khajeh Piri, 2013 , p. 12).

In describing the creation of the human being, even during the earliest embryonic stages, the Qur'an attributes the entire process directly to God's power and will:

"He is the One who perfected everything He created. He began the creation of man from clay. Then He made his progeny from an extract of a humble fluid. Then He fashioned him in due proportion and breathed into him of His Spirit..." (al-Sajdah, 7-9).

Likewise, referring to the act of shaping human beings, God states: "It is Allah who made the earth a resting place for you and the sky a canopy, and He formed you and perfected your forms..." (al-Ghāfir, 64).

These verses demonstrate that God not only prepared the earth and the heavens as a suitable environment for human life but also personally fashioned the human form most excellently. They clearly indicate that the human being, from the very beginning of existence, is a divine creation brought into being by God's will and endowed with the right to life. Consequently, any aggression against this creation constitutes an assault upon the will of its Creator.

This understanding fundamentally differs from the materialistic

worldview. From the theocentric perspective, the embryo is not merely the product of the biological union of sperm and ovum; rather, it is a creature of God, who employs natural causes as instruments for the realization of His creative will. Consequently, the embryo possesses an identity grounded in its relationship with God and cannot be regarded merely as the property of the parents or as a biological commodity. This principle constitutes the foundation of the embryo's sanctity and dignity, for whatever is directly created by God may neither be destroyed nor exploited by human beings.

As a foundational identity principle, the doctrine of divine creation provides a firm and enduring basis for confronting the complex challenges of the modern age concerning the protection of embryonic life. The embryo is neither the possession of its parents nor merely a biological phenomenon; rather, it is a divine creation whose protection is an undeniable moral obligation. Accordingly, safeguarding embryonic life is not merely an individual or familial duty but also a social and religious responsibility that binds both society and its governing authorities. This perspective provides a robust ethical and legal foundation for addressing contemporary challenges in protecting the embryo and preserving human dignity.

3.2. The Principle of Divine Ownership

The second component of the embryo's theocentric identity is its complete belonging to God in terms of ownership and lordship. The Holy Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes that everything in the heavens and the earth, including human beings and all stages of their existence, belongs exclusively to God:

"To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth" (al-Nisā', 131).

This verse affirms that everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to God because He is the Creator of all beings. The expression "Whatever" encompasses both rational and non-rational creatures, including angels, human beings, jinn, animals, plants, and inanimate objects (Andālūsī, 2001, 1, p. 389). According to Qur'anic exegetes, God's ownership extends to creation, possession, and absolute authority of disposition (Ālūsī, 1994, vol. 2, p. 243; Baydāwī, 1997, vol. 1, p. 165). Consequently, both the human body and soul are under God's exclusive ownership.

To further illustrate this principle of ownership, the Qur'an refers to the creation of the embryo and the determination of its sex: "To Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates whatever He wills. He grants females to whom He wills, and He grants males to whom He wills; or He grants both males and females, and He renders whom He wills infertile. Surely He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful" (al-Shūrā, 49-50).

The connection between this verse and the preceding verses lies in their discussion of divine provision, with children being presented here as one of God's blessings and provisions (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996, vol. 18, p. 68). Accordingly, both offspring and their sex fall entirely within God's ownership and sovereign will, beyond the power of human beings to determine independently.

Indeed, this verse provides a clear manifestation of God's ownership, since determining the sex of a child is a matter over which no human being possesses absolute control. Despite scientific advancements, no one can determine the sex of a child with complete certainty. Although certain biological factors may influence the probability of conceiving a male or female child, none can guarantee the outcome (Makarem Shirazi, 1995, vol. 20, p. 483).

This same truth is reflected in the verse: "Your wives are a field for you; therefore approach your field as you wish" (al-Baqarah, 223).

Here, the Qur'an likens the womb of a woman to cultivated land prepared for sowing. Just as the soil itself does not determine the nature of the seed planted within it, the mother's womb does not determine the sex of the embryo. Rather, this is associated with the male reproductive fluid. This point is further emphasized in the verse:

"And that He created the two mates, male and female, from a drop of semen when it is emitted" (al-Najm, 45-46) (Esmi Qayah Bashi, 2024, p. 13).

Despite the extensive efforts of infertility specialists, there remain individuals who are unable to conceive, and scientific advances have not succeeded in granting them children. This reality demonstrates that God Almighty is the absolute Owner of all creation. He alone grants offspring and determines their sex according to His will, for "Indeed, He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful."

God possesses complete knowledge of all the causes and forces operating in the universe. He knows how these causes sometimes work in harmony and at other times in opposition, and He knows how every creature comes into existence according to His predetermined plan. These realities are manifestations of God's infinite knowledge in creation and His sovereign power in governing the universe in accordance with His wisdom (Ibn 'Āshūr, n.d., 25, p. 194).

The principle of divine ownership removes the embryo's identity from the sphere of human ownership and contractual arrangements and places it within the domain of divine lordship. Based on this identity principle, it can be argued that if the embryo belongs exclusively to God, then the parents are merely trustees of a divine trust. As trustees, they possess no proprietary right over God's

creation and therefore have no authority to destroy it according to their personal wishes.

3.3. The Principle of Purposiveness

The third component of the embryo's theocentric identity is the principle of purposiveness (teleology) governing its development. The Holy Qur'an presents the stages of human creation, from the fertilized drop to full development, with remarkable precision, portraying this developmental process as a manifestation of God's infinite power and wise governance:

"Indeed, We created man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a drop of fluid in a secure resting place. Then We created the drop into a clinging substance; then We created the clinging substance into a chewed-like lump; then We created the lump into bones; then We clothed the bones with flesh; thereafter We produced him as another creation. So blessed is Allah, the Best of Creators" (al-Mu'minūn, 12-14).

The Qur'an narrates the stages of embryonic development in such a way that each stage appears to serve as a preparation for the next, with the entire process advancing toward the stage described as "Another creation":

"...Then We produced him as another creation. So blessed is Allah, the Best of Creators" (al-Mu'minūn, 14).

The repeated use of the conjunction "Then" throughout these verses indicates a purposeful and sequential order in which each developmental stage is qualitatively distinct from the preceding one (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996, vol. 15, p. 21).

Within the Qur'an's theocentric worldview, the embryo is not merely a purposeless mass of cells but a being progressing along a

divinely ordained path toward human perfection. According to classical exegetes, the phrase "Another creation" refers to the infusion of the soul, at which point the embryo becomes a human being in the full sense of the term (Ṭabarī, 1991, vol. 18, p. 8). This understanding constitutes a pivotal element in the embryo's identity within the Qur'anic worldview. Even before ensoulment, the embryo possesses inherent dignity and participates in a purposeful process of creation. It is potentially human from the moment of conception; however, following the infusion of the soul, it attains complete human personhood, at which point the legal rulings concerning the inviolability of human life become fully applicable, as will be discussed later.

God Almighty has appointed a definite course for the embryo to fulfill its divinely intended purpose. He states: "...And We cause to remain in the wombs whatever We will until an appointed term..."

According to *Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, this means: We establish in the womb whatever embryo We will and do not allow it to miscarry until its appointed period of gestation has been completed; thereafter We bring you forth as infants (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996, vol. 14, p. 344). The fact that God has prepared a secure place for the embryo to remain until the completion of its designated term clearly demonstrates the purposive nature of its growth and development (Ṭūsī, n.d., vol. 7, p. 354).

Qur'anic exegetes maintain that the detailed description of embryonic development and subsequent human growth serves a broader educational purpose. Through these verses, the Qur'an removes human beings from the familiarity of everyday experience and invites them to contemplate the profound mysteries of existence. The purpose is to keep humanity continually mindful of the wonders of creation, which in turn remind them of God's greatness and sustain an enduring relationship with Him. Such a worldview establishes a

firm foundation for human commitment to the divinely ordained order governing life. As one's awareness of God's presence increases, one's sense of responsibility before Him likewise becomes deeper and more profound (Faḍlullāh, 1998, vol. 16, p. 139).

The Holy Qur'an further portrays the complete cycle of human existence in the following verse:

"O humankind! If you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, then indeed We created you from dust, then from a drop of fluid, then from a clinging substance, then from a chewed-like lump, partly formed and partly unformed, so that We may make clear to you. And We cause to remain in the wombs whatever We will until an appointed term. Then We bring you forth as infants; then We nurture you until you reach your full strength. Among you are those who die, and among you are those who are returned to the feeblest stage of old age, so that after having possessed knowledge they know nothing" (al-Ḥajj, 5).

This verse presents the entire course of human life, from the implantation of the embryo in the womb, through birth, childhood, maturity, intellectual perfection, and finally death or senility. This purposeful narrative demonstrates that not only embryonic development but every stage of human existence unfolds according to a divinely ordained plan established by the "Best of Creators." Thus, the governing order of creation is fundamentally teleological and directed toward a specific purpose (Makarem Shirazi, 1995, 14, p. 22). From this perspective, abortion represents not merely the interruption of embryonic development but the disruption of the purposeful order of life that God has established within the womb "Until an appointed term."

Protecting the embryo therefore means protecting a sacred

divine process. The distinction made in Islamic law between normative obligations and legal consequences reflects the depth and realism of the *Sharī'ah* in safeguarding embryonic life. In light of the principle of purposiveness, the embryo, even in its earliest developmental stages, is not a being devoid of sanctity or one whose life may be terminated without justification. By concluding the account of embryonic creation with the declaration "So blessed is Allah, the Best of Creators," the Qur'an confers value and sacredness upon every stage of embryonic development. Accordingly, abortion at any stage constitutes the interruption of a developmental process that God Himself has created with purpose and wisdom.

As noted earlier, God attributes the formation of the human being directly to Himself:

"It is Allah who made the earth a resting place for you and the sky a canopy, and He formed you and perfected your forms..." (Ghāfir, 64).

According to Qur'anic commentators, the expression the "Perfection of your forms" signifies the harmony, balance, and proportionality of all aspects of human existence, such that every component works together in enabling the human being to attain ultimate happiness and perfection (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996, vol. 16, p. 249). Thus, in the Qur'anic worldview, creation and perfection are inseparable concepts. Every human being enjoys this divine gift from the very beginning of existence, that is, from the embryonic stage. In other words, the embryo develops through a purposeful process in which every aspect of its being is fashioned in proper proportion and harmony, preparing it for the journey of earthly life and the attainment of its ultimate perfection.

This principle provides the Qur'anic response to the challenge

of abortion because a pregnancy is "Unwanted." If the embryo's developmental course is purposeful and has been designed by the Best of Creators, it cannot be terminated without a legitimate justification merely because of financial hardship, lack of preparedness, or similar considerations. Thus, abortion is not simply the destruction of a biological entity; rather, it is the interruption of a divinely ordained, purpose-driven process of creation.

3.4. The Principle of the Infusion of the Soul

One of the fundamental, and perhaps the most significant, principles in the theocentric identity of the embryo concerns the manner of human creation and the feature that distinguishes human beings from all other creatures. According to this principle, after completing the material creation of the human being, God bestows upon it a unique mode of existence that is exclusive to human dignity: the infusion of the divine spirit.

God Almighty states: "Then He fashioned him in due proportion and breathed into him of His Spirit" (al-Sajdah, 9).

This verse refers to a stage of creation that occurs after the completion of the embryo's physical formation. It marks the transition from the embryo's biological identity to its metaphysical identity. According to Qur'anic exegetes, the phrase "He breathed into him of His Spirit" is a metaphorical expression, drawing an analogy with the act of breathing (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996, vol. 16, p. 250). Exegetes further explain that the attribution of the spirit to God constitutes an honorific attribution, indicating that the human spirit possesses a noble and distinguished status by virtue of its special relationship to God (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999, vol. 19, p. 139).

This attribution signifies God's exclusive ownership of the

human spirit and constitutes the basis of humanity's ontological distinction from all other creatures. Likewise, the divine command requiring the angels to prostrate before Adam after this event, "So when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall before him in prostration," (al-Hijr, 29) symbolizes the acknowledgment of this unique dignity. From the theocentric perspective, the infusion of the spirit establishes an existential connection between the immaterial soul and the material body (Tabāṭabā'ī, 1996, vol. 12, p. 154), transforming the human being into a creature endowed with intrinsic dignity. Consequently, abortion after this stage is unquestionably prohibited because it constitutes an assault upon a being that possesses the divine spirit.

From the standpoint of theocentric identity, the infusion of the spirit conveys two fundamental messages. First, even before ensoulment, the embryo possesses identity and dignity, albeit in a gradational and developing form that reaches its perfection through the infusion of the spirit. Second, ensoulment represents God's formal declaration inaugurating a mode of life whose sanctity and inviolability become equivalent to those of a fully developed human being.

To understand the Qur'anic position accurately, it is necessary to distinguish between biological life and the human spirit. Life itself exists in different degrees: vegetative life, animal life, and human life. From the moment of fertilization, the embryo possesses vegetative life and gradually acquires animal life; accordingly, it is recognized as a living being (Shakerin, 2010, p. 86). Thus, being alive is not synonymous with possessing the human spirit. The Qur'anic verses describing embryonic development emphasize both the gradual nature of life and the intrinsic significance of each developmental stage. Consequently, even before the infusion of the spirit, the embryo, as the earliest and

potential stage of human life, enjoys sanctity and the right to life.

Islamic jurisprudence, drawing upon this Qur'anic principle of embryonic identity, distinguishes between two legal dimensions. The majority of Imami jurists, relying on Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions, maintain that abortion is prohibited from the moment of fertilization and that anyone who intentionally terminates the embryo commits a sinful act (Nourahmadi et al., 2020, p. 65), since such an act constitutes an assault upon developing life and a potential human being.

This prohibition represents a normative ruling rooted in the intrinsic dignity of the earliest stages of human creation. By contrast, the positive legal ruling, namely the determination of the amount of financial compensation, depends upon the precise timing of ensoulment, which is generally regarded as occurring after four months of gestation. Accordingly, the majority of jurists consider the completion of four lunar months after conception to be the time when the soul is infused into the embryo, a determination primarily relevant for calculating the applicable (Jahaniyan & Farhudi, 2009, p. 163).

In Islamic law, the compensation for the death of an embryo after ensoulment is equivalent to the full blood money. In contrast, before ensoulment the amount varies according to the embryo's stage of development (Hashemi Shahroudi, 2011, vol. 9, p. 65). Consequently, abortion before ensoulment does not incur the full amount of blood money (Kulaynī, 1986, vol. 7, p. 343); rather, according to a narration from Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS), the amount of compensation differs at each developmental stage of the embryo.¹

¹. A narration from *ʿAbdullāh ibn Muskān* from Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS), who said: "The blood money of the fetus is divided into five parts: One-fifth for the semen (is twenty dinars), two-fifths for the clot (is forty dinars), three-fifths for the lump of

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This distinction demonstrates that Islamic jurisprudence simultaneously emphasizes the intrinsic prohibition of abortion while also taking into account the objective stages of embryonic development when determining legal compensation. Therefore, scholarly disagreement regarding the precise moment of ensoulment should never be interpreted as denying the embryo's right to life from the beginning of its existence.

Indeed, the Qur'anic expression: "Then We produced him as another creation" (al-Mu'minūn, 14) with reference to the creation of the spirit indicates that the infusion of the soul is fundamentally different from ordinary biological development. It does not belong to the realm of natural physical processes, nor can its true nature be fully comprehended through empirical knowledge (Rezaei Isfahani, 2007, 2, p. 559). For this reason, ensoulment is regarded as a metaphysical phenomenon that lies beyond the scope of medical science. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of medicine, the embryo has been a living organism from the moment of fertilization, possessing vegetative and subsequently animal life (Rezvani Mofrad & Nourahmadi, 2022, p. 4).

Accordingly, the relationship between the infusion of the divine spirit and the embryo's theocentric identity demonstrates that the embryo is far more than a biological phenomenon or a part of the mother's body. Rather, it is a being that, on the one hand, advances through a divinely ordained and purposeful process of creation and, on

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flesh (is sixty dinars), and four-fifths for the bones (is eighty dinars). Once the fetus is complete, its compensation is one hundred dinars. However, once the soul is breathed into it, its blood money becomes one thousand dinars, or ten thousand dirhams if it is a male; and if it is a female, then five hundred dinars" (Ḥurr 'Āmilī, vol. 29, p. 229).

the other, through the infusion of the spirit attains the status of God's vicegerent and the fullness of human dignity. Consequently, protecting the embryo, both before and after ensoulment, is a religious, ethical, and human obligation. The difference is that after ensoulment, the embryo's sanctity and the legal consequences attached to its protection become considerably stronger and more categorical. This gradational yet dignity-centered understanding represents one of the most distinctive features of Qur'anic bioethics in contrast to the reductionist approaches characteristic of much contemporary bioethical discourse.

3.5. The Principle of Inherent Human Dignity

Another fundamental component of the embryo's identity within the Qur'an's epistemological framework is the principle of inherent human dignity. Within this framework, the human being, as a creature of God, possesses a set of fundamental rights that are all grounded in a single foundational principle. Foremost among these is the right to life, which constitutes the prerequisite for the realization of every other right, since all rights and obligations presuppose the existence of a living human person. In this respect, the Qur'anic perspective is consistent with the foundations of modern international human rights, which are likewise built upon the concept of the inherent dignity of the human person. Human dignity arises from God's infusion of the divine spirit into humanity and, as previously discussed, encompasses every stage of human existence, including the embryonic stage.

The Holy Qur'an explicitly affirms the exalted status of humanity based on this inherent dignity: "Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, and provided them with good and lawful provisions." (al-Isrā': 70)

It is noteworthy that the expression "We have honored" refers

to a positive divine act rather than a response to human conduct or reciprocal respect. In other words, God created human nature itself as inherently noble and dignified. This dignity is a divine gift implanted within human nature, not an acquired or conventional status (Motahhari, 1988, p. 230). It is this inherent nobility that grants humanity superiority over the rest of creation.

This ontological dignity rests upon two divine endowments. The first is the infusion of the divine spirit, emphasized in the verse: "...I breathed into him of My Spirit" (al-Sajdah, 9).

The second is the conferral of the office of caliphate upon humanity: "And when your Lord said to the angels: "Indeed, I am placing upon the earth a vicegerent" (al-Baqarah, 30).

These two characteristics rendered the human being worthy of the angels' prostration and elevated humanity above many other created beings (Salimi, 2015, p. 254). The phrase "And We favored them" in the continuation of the verse expresses the logical consequence of this dignity: "And We favored them greatly over many of those whom We created" (al-Isrā', 70).

Thus, it is humanity's inherent dignity that forms the basis of its superiority over other creatures.

The expressions the "Children of Adam" and "Them" in this verse are universal and unrestricted. Their generality indicates that inherent dignity is not limited by race, gender, religion, or any particular stage of human development. Rather, being human alone is the sole criterion for possessing this dignity. Accordingly, every being that belongs to the human family falls within the scope of this divine honor. Since the embryo constitutes the earliest and indispensable stage in the biological existence of the children of Adam, it cannot

reasonably be excluded from the universal application of this Qur'anic principle.

The universality of this principle extends even beyond the stage of ensoulment. Although some scholars maintain that the infusion of the spirit is the direct source of human dignity, the present approach regards dignity as an intrinsic quality inseparable from human nature itself, encompassing even the stages preceding ensoulment, which represent the preparatory process for receiving the fullness of that dignity (Mesbah, 2007, p. 362). Consequently, any assault upon the embryo, including abortion before the infusion of the spirit, constitutes an assault upon the inherent dignity of the human being.

A subtle yet important aspect of this principle concerns its relationship to the earlier stages of creation. To affirm the embryo's inherent dignity does not imply that, at the moment of fertilization, it possesses all the characteristics of a fully developed human being. Rather, it means that, because the embryo is a being progressing toward full humanity, its status and sanctity require protection from every form of aggression and objectification. This understanding stands in direct contrast to theories that make human dignity contingent upon self-consciousness, actual legal personhood, or similar functional criteria.

For this reason, within the theocentric worldview, protecting the embryo is not merely a matter of jurisprudence or medicine; it is a practical commitment to the Qur'anic conception of the human being as an inherently dignified creature whose existence transcends the purely material. Accordingly, respect and protection must be accorded to the embryo from the very moment of fertilization. Promoting this perspective not only provides a coherent foundation for protective legislation within Islamic societies but also contributes to intercultural

dialogue on human rights by offering a profound and internally consistent answer to the question of the origin of human dignity.

3.6. The Principle of the Sanctity of Human Life

The sixth and final Qur'anic component of the embryo's theocentric identity is the principle of the sanctity of human life. As discussed previously, Qur'anic anthropology regards the right to life as a divine gift and the most fundamental of all human rights, upon which every other right and obligation depends. This right constitutes the outward expression of the inherent dignity embedded within human nature. From this perspective, the deliberate taking of the life of an innocent human being is not merely an individual crime but an assault upon the very reality of humanity and a threat to the moral foundations of society. The Holy Qur'an explains both the sanctity of this right and the consequences of violating it, extending even to embryonic life, within the framework of both worldly legislation and divine justice in the Hereafter.

It is important to distinguish between the principle of the sanctity of life and the previously discussed principle of inherent dignity. Inherent dignity primarily concerns the intrinsic worth of the human being, whereas the sanctity of life concerns the normative legal and moral prohibition against violating that worth. Put differently, inherent dignity affirms that the "Embryo possesses value." At the same time, the sanctity of life declares that "Abortion and any assault upon the embryo constitute a sinful act and entail legal liability, including financial compensation."

On this basis, the Qur'an emphasizes the gravity of unlawfully taking innocent life:

"Whoever kills a person, unless in retribution for another life

or for spreading corruption in the land, it is as though he has killed all of mankind" (al-Mā'idah, 32).

This verse equates the killing of a single innocent person with the destruction of all humanity. Such an expression indicates that the existence of every individual human being symbolizes the entirety of humanity and that every human life represents a manifestation of the single reality called humanity. Consequently, destroying one manifestation is, in effect, an affront to humanity itself.

To safeguard this fundamental right, the Qur'an prescribes severe consequences in both this world and the Hereafter. The worldly punishment for unlawful killing is retaliation (retaliation), as stated:

"And there is life for you in retaliation, O people of understanding, so that you may become God-conscious" (al-Baqarah, 179).

Likewise, the Qur'an describes the punishment in the Hereafter:

"Whoever intentionally kills a believer, his recompense is Hell, wherein he shall abide eternally; Allah's wrath and curse are upon him, and He has prepared for him a tremendous punishment" (al-Nisā', 93).

The promise of eternal punishment for intentional murder demonstrates the supreme value accorded to human life within the Islamic moral order. It underscores the gravity and irreparability of this offense before God.

Furthermore, given the general and unrestricted use of the word "Person" in the verse "Whoever kills a person...", the sanctity of life is not confined to mature or adult individuals. Rather, it extends to the human embryo, which acquires the right to life from the moment it comes into existence as a fertilized ovum within the mother's womb. Accordingly, many Islamic jurists have held that abortion falls within

the scope of this Qur'anic principle and have regarded it as analogous to the unlawful taking of human life.

Because the Holy Qur'an not only refers in several verses to the pre-Islamic Arab practices of female infanticide and child-killing, as in the verses,

"And when the girl buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed," (al-Takwīr, 8-9), and "Thus, for many of the polytheists, their partners made the killing of their children seem fair...", (al-An'ām, 137) but also addresses the killing of unborn children, whether male or female,¹ in the verses, "Do not kill your children for fear of poverty," (al-Isrā': 31) and "Do not kill your children because of poverty; We provide for you and for them" (al-An'ām, 151).

In these verses, the Qur'an explicitly rejects poverty or fear of poverty as a legitimate justification for taking the life of one's children.

It is noteworthy that, in legal theory, legal personality, that is, the capacity to possess rights and obligations, is attributed to every living human being. Likewise, in Islamic jurisprudence, an embryo, provided that it is born alive, is recognized as possessing legal personality and is entitled to such rights as inheritance, testamentary benefits, and financial compensation (Saket, 1997, p. 49). Accordingly, abortion constitutes an infringement upon this developing legal personality.

Therefore, throughout every stage of its development, from implantation in the mother's womb and the commencement of embryonic growth until its complete formation before birth, the

¹. "The pronoun "*Kum*" (you all) indicates that the prohibition encompasses the killing of both girls and boys" (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999, vol. 20, p. 331).

embryo possesses both the right to life and an independent identity. Within the theocentric worldview, aborting the embryo, even before birth, constitutes a form of unlawful killing of a life protected by law. Although spouses may lawfully take measures to achieve conception, once fertilization has occurred and pregnancy has been established, they no longer possess the right to terminate the embryo's life (Khajeh Piri, 2013, p. 36).

The Holy Qur'an further illustrates this principle in describing the women who pledged allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad. Among the conditions of their pledge was refraining from killing their children:

"O Prophet! When believing women come to you pledging allegiance... that they will not kill their children, nor fabricate falsehood..." (al-Mumtahanah, 12).

According to Qur'anic exegetes, the prohibition of killing one's children in this verse includes abortion as well (Hosseini Hamedani, 1983, vol. 16, p. 308). Thus, preserving the life of one's child, even before birth, is regarded as an integral component of a Muslim's religious and moral obligations.

In essence, by emphasizing the sanctity of human life and by outlining the severe worldly and eschatological consequences of violating it, the Holy Qur'an establishes a robust foundation both for recognizing the embryo's identity and for developing legislation and bioethical principles concerning embryonic life. The Qur'anic equation of killing one innocent person with killing all humanity underscores the inseparable relationship between individual human life and the collective dignity of humankind. Furthermore, the Qur'anic prohibition against killing one's children demonstrates that protecting embryonic life is the logical and necessary extension of the Qur'anic doctrine of the right to life.

4. Applying the Components of the Embryo's Theocentric Identity to Contemporary Bioethical Challenges

Having identified the six components of the embryo's theocentric identity based on the Qur'anic verses, this section examines their theoretical and practical application in addressing contemporary bioethical challenges.

Among the most controversial issues in contemporary bioethics concerning the embryo is abortion. Social, economic, and cultural transformations, together with scientific advances in medicine and biology, have generated new challenges regarding embryonic life. Economic hardship, fear of an uncertain future, and concerns about poverty are frequently advanced as justifications for abortion. Within this context, protecting the embryo as a human being who has not yet been born has become one of the most contentious issues of the modern world.

At times, this challenge has been presented as conflicting with concerns about population growth and has been viewed as an obstacle to the economic and social development of developing countries. Although advances in medical technology should ideally strengthen the protection of embryonic life by facilitating earlier diagnosis and more effective prenatal care, various approaches grounded in humanism, secularism, and certain radical interpretations of feminist thought have instead placed the preservation of embryonic life at risk and intensified ethical debates surrounding abortion. Rather than enhancing protection for embryonic life, these approaches have contributed to increasing numbers of elective abortions justified on diverse grounds. Consequently, many countries have adopted increasingly permissive abortion laws. For example, twenty-six countries, including the United Kingdom, Japan, and France, have

legalized abortion without substantial restriction (Hariri & Shokrbeygi, 2022, p. 2). United Kingdom Japan France

In reality, the dominant contemporary approach to abortion is fundamentally relative and context-dependent. National laws are generally shaped by changing social, political, and economic circumstances and therefore lack fixed philosophical or ethical foundations capable of universally determining the moral and legal status of the embryo. As a result, the absence of stable normative principles has produced contradictory and continually changing legal standards across the world. Within the modern relativist paradigm, abortion is viewed primarily as a multidimensional social issue that should be resolved by balancing the interests of the mother, demographic considerations, and individual freedoms. This perspective emphasizes utilitarianism, personal autonomy, and changing social conditions, while assigning the embryo a fluid and relative moral status. Consequently, the most fundamental ethical issue, the existence of an emerging human life, often remains insufficiently acknowledged.

In contrast to this relativistic approach, the Qur'an-based theocentric paradigm recognizes the embryo as possessing an independent identity, grounded in the principles of inherent human dignity and objective moral responsibility. The Islamic theocentric worldview, founded upon the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, provides fixed, universal, and immutable principles for understanding the embryo's independent identity. In practical application, these principles establish strong safeguards against unjustified abortions. From the very beginning of its existence in the mother's womb, the embryo is, by virtue of the principle of direct divine creation, under the absolute ownership of God. In accordance with the principle of the purposiveness of creation, it proceeds along a divinely ordained

developmental path designed to culminate in "Another creation." Accordingly, the principles of inherent dignity and the sanctity of human life characterize any abortion performed without a legitimate law-based justification as the unlawful taking of human life and explicitly prohibit it.

Unlike the uncertainty found in certain contemporary legal systems regarding the embryo's individuality, humanity, and legal personality (Rostami et al., 2013, p. 25), Islam, based on the Holy Qur'an, recognizes the embryo as a human being possessing the right to life from the earliest stages of its development and regards the sanctity of that life as inviolable.

Accordingly, abortion is regarded as categorically prohibited in Islamic jurisprudence. This prohibition applies in all circumstances, whether before or after the ensoulment of the fetus, whether the pregnancy results from lawful marriage or illicit intercourse, and whether the abortion is performed with or without the consent of the parents (Mazlounzadeh, 2023, p. 5).

The sole exception to this general rule is therapeutic abortion, which is permitted based on the Islamic legal principles of necessity and the negation of undue hardship, in situations where there is a conflict between preserving the life of the mother (who possesses a fully ensouled human life) and that of the fetus before ensoulment (Emami Qeshlaq et al., 2018, p. 4). In such cases, the Islamic legal system applies the principle of prioritizing the greater over the lesser interest, thereby permitting abortion to safeguard the mother's life, which is considered the overriding interest (A Group of Authors, 2007, 1, p. 240). This preference is justified not only because of the mother's established life but also because of her social and familial responsibilities (Hariri & Shokrbeygi, 2022, p. 5).

Research indicates that the primary reasons for abortion in the contemporary world are factors such as population control, economic concerns, limited resources, women's reproductive autonomy, maternal employment, the perceived burden of childrearing, and the preservation of physical appearance, rather than exceptional medical circumstances such as threats to the mother's life or severe fetal abnormalities (Nikzad & Joursaraei, 2014, p. 3). Nevertheless, more than two-thirds of the world's population currently live in countries where abortion is legally permitted either upon the woman's request or when her life is endangered (Akrami et al., 2010, p. 2). Addressing this deficiency in legal protection requires a return to more fundamental principles concerning the embryo's independent identity.

It is noteworthy that permissive approaches toward abortion are generally grounded in materialist, secular, humanistic, and radical feminist paradigms. Materialism and secularism reduce life to its purely physical dimensions or exclude religion from the sphere of legislation. By removing transcendent foundations from human existence, these approaches produce an ambiguous conception of embryonic identity. Since they define personhood according to such criteria as self-awareness, rationality, reasoning ability, autonomy, and purposive agency, they exclude the embryo from the category of legal and moral personhood. Consequently, decisions concerning abortion become purely human-centered and may disregard the embryo's right to life (Mashayekhi et al., 2019, p. 3).

Likewise, although humanism is ostensibly centered upon human beings and therefore should seek to preserve human life, its inadequate philosophical foundations and lack of reliance upon divine rights prevent it from defending the embryo's right to life unequivocally whenever competing interests arise.

Radical feminism, moreover, by insisting absolutely upon a

woman's ownership of her own body and her unrestricted right to autonomous choice, rejects any legal limitation on abortion. According to this perspective, the mother alone serves as the ultimate moral authority regarding abortion because her own life is intimately connected with the fate of the embryo (Alizadeh & Gharibbi, 2018, p. 4). A prominent illustration of this approach was the 1973 decision of the Supreme Court of the United States, which recognized abortion as falling within the constitutional right to privacy and declared restrictive abortion laws incompatible with women's liberty and personal autonomy (Milanlouei & Arab Asadi, 2025, p. 10). Supreme Court of the United States

By contrast, according to the principles established above, God possesses absolute ownership, and the embryo, as a divine creation, belongs to God. Consequently, women cannot terminate a pregnancy merely based on such claims as personal freedom or bodily ownership. These principles do not define the embryo as possessing an independent identity under the sovereignty of God, over which parents nor has any other individual unrestricted authority. Accordingly, depriving the embryo of life without a legitimate law-based and legal justification is impermissible.

Within the theocentric worldview, life is not merely a biological phenomenon but possesses spiritual and sacred dimensions. The spirit, as a divine element within the human being, constitutes an integral aspect of human existence and confers honor and dignity upon it. To ignore this spiritual dimension and reduce the human being solely to material existence is to deny authentic human nature and undermine the sanctity and dignity of humanity as the noblest of God's creatures. Consequently, the embryo deserves respect from the very beginning of its existence, while ensoulment represents a developmental stage that gives rise to particular juridical rulings.

Thus, the right to life is protected from the earliest moment of existence, whereas the stage of ensoulment enjoys a distinct and elevated legal status. Accordingly, the central challenge surrounding abortion is not merely a legal or medical issue; rather, it is fundamentally an anthropological and ethical question.

From this perspective, the teachings of the Holy Qur'an provide a systematic response to contemporary bioethical challenges. By establishing enduring metaphysical principles, including the inherent dignity of the human person, the sanctity of divinely bestowed life, and the purposiveness of creation, the theocentric worldview offers a profound answer to the questions of the embryo's identity and its rights. It thereby shifts decision-making concerning embryonic life from the realm of fluctuating social preferences to that of enduring moral obligations. Within this framework, protecting the embryo constitutes the logical extension of respect for human reality and the acceptance of responsibility toward God's design for human life. Consequently, legislation in Islamic societies should reflect these immutable and identity-defining principles.

Conclusion

The theocentric conception of embryonic identity in the Holy Qur'an extends far beyond a purely theological or juristic discussion. Rather, it offers a comprehensive and multilayered framework for addressing contemporary bioethical challenges. Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology and focusing on Qur'anic verses concerning embryonic development, this study concludes that the embryo's identity in the Qur'anic worldview rests upon six fundamental principles: "The principle of Divine Creation; the principle of Divine Ownership; the principle of the Purposiveness of Creation; the principle of the Infusion of the Divine Spirit; the principle of Inherent

Human Dignity; and the principle of the Sanctity of Human Life."

Taken together, these six principles constitute a coherent and multidimensional framework for understanding the embryo's theocentric identity. Within this framework, the embryo is neither an object, a commodity, nor merely a part of the mother's body. Rather, it is a being whose creation originates from God, whose ownership belongs to God, whose developmental course is divinely ordained toward perfection, into whom a divine spirit is breathed, and who therefore possesses an inviolable dignity and sanctity that no human being may violate except in cases of legally recognized necessity, such as saving the mother's life.

Applying these principles to the principal contemporary bioethical challenge, abortion, demonstrates that the Qur'anic perspective advocates neither unrestricted permissibility nor an entirely exceptionless prohibition. Instead, it presents a balanced position grounded in the inherent dignity of the human being and reverence for God's ordained order of creation. Within this framework, abortion is permissible only under the exceptional circumstance of choosing the greater over the lesser interest, namely, preserving the mother's life, and remains subject to the payment of the prescribed financial compensation.

The central finding of this study is that the embryo's theocentric identity is an identity in the process of becoming, rather than a static or merely biological identity. This graded understanding of embryonic identity, while consistently affirming its inherent dignity, provides a conceptual bridge between the findings of modern embryology and the ethical imperatives articulated in the Holy Qur'an.

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