

## Editorial

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### Science, Cloning and Morality

The most recent outcome of the successful cloning of mammals by Wilmut and his colleagues using somatic cell nuclear transfer methods (SCNT), has been a statement by the Inter-Academies Panel – a panel of the scientific academies of the world – supporting a ban on the cloning of people:

National academies of science from all parts of the world are united in supporting a worldwide ban on the reproductive cloning of human beings, and in calling for cloning to obtain embryonic stem cells for both research and therapeutic purposes to be excluded from this ban.

This is an ethical statement, not necessarily one about morality. The practice of science has its own ethics associated with openness, honesty and the full disclosure of its results in the public interest. The statement is concerned more with the recently discovered likely danger of deformity and a lack of success in the cloning of higher mammals such as monkeys than with concepts such as the Kantian notion of human dignity, although for some scientists those considerations will be of importance as well. The statement says:

Scientific research on reproductive cloning in other mammals shows that there is a markedly higher than normal incidence of fetal disorders and loss throughout pregnancy, and of malformation and death among newborns. There is no reason to suppose that the outcome would be different in humans. There would thus be a serious threat to the health of the cloned individual, not just at birth but potentially at all stages of life – without obvious compensating benefit to the individual bearing this threat. Moreover, death of a fetus late in pregnancy could pose a serious threat to the health of the woman carrying it. Even on a purely scientific basis, therefore, it would be quite irresponsible for anyone to attempt human reproductive cloning given our current level of scientific knowledge.

The problems of human cloning still exercise the public's mind in Australia as elsewhere and the Australian Academy of Science, associated with the above statement, took a lead here three years ago in establishing a position statement which is reflected in the content of the international panel's announcement. The Australian government established a parliamentary inquiry – the Andrews commission – which carefully took evidence. This has led to legislation banning the cloning of people and has established a moratorium of three years from 2002 on experiments using SCNT towards human tissue production for therapeutic purposes (“therapeutic cloning”). The Australian Academy of Science supports this legislation while holding to its opinion of the desirability of human embryonic stem cell experimentation and carefully regulated research toward therapeutic outcomes using cloning methods.

In a number of public consultations, lectures and discussions, I have found

a wide variety of attitudes amongst Christians and others on the morality of cloning work. For non-Christians, the Kantian 'categorical imperative' is the rational source of the golden rule 'do as you would be done by' and imposes a 'universal duty to respect the rights and interests of others'.<sup>1</sup> Does Christian belief take morality beyond this and Kant's associated reasoning about the duties associated with a concept of human dignity? It has been put to me that amongst Christians, there is a need to understand if there is a difference between what some call the 'sanctity of human life' and others the 'sanctity of people'. This difference, for some biblical Christians, revolves around the status of the fertilised egg and the early embryo, and a developmental view of the human person as a respondent to God's grace – but the matter is moot as the Bible is not clear on pre-natal life.

Indeed amongst young Christian people with whom I have spoken, two clear but contrasting attitudes have been displayed in the cloning debate in Australia. On the one hand, I was most surprised to find a view that cloning a human person (if that could be realised scientifically) would be less objectionable than the production and destruction of SCNT embryos for therapeutic cloning as no human life was destroyed. Many also welcomed the point made by Denis Alexander that if such an event were to occur, Christians should be the first to welcome the child as a fully human individual who can become a child of God like any other person.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, I have found a clear repugnance to the cloning of people coupled with a definite acceptance of the need for research using human embryonic stem cells and SCNT towards therapeutic ends as being a gift of God as are other medical therapies. In one Christian group, a young woman who had been silent during most of the talk and discussion, eventually cited the case of a distinguished Australian whose chauffeur had donated one of his kidneys so that the man could live. For her, the gift of one of her eggs so that 'someone could live' would be no problem.

It will take a long time for these attitudes to be reconciled but there is an enormous task for Christians and scientists alike to understand the facts of the science as it develops, for there to be very open disclosure of the science going on towards cloning and for there to be caution in that process to avoid the degrading and immoral use of humans, their eggs or their embryos as commodities. The Inter-Academies Panel statement tacitly acknowledges this caution, for a 'wastage' of hundreds or thousands of human eggs to achieve one live birth would be for many an inadmissible use.

What then might be the elements of a Christian response at this stage of the cloning debate? Is there a conflict between Christian and secular morality? I pose that question in this editorial but cannot fully answer it. The cloning

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1 Kant, Roger Scruton. P 72 Oxford University Press, 1982.

2 D.R.Alexander, 'Cloning Humans – distorting the image of God?', Cambridge Papers 10, No. 2. June 2001 (on-line at [www.cis.org.uk](http://www.cis.org.uk) see Articles)

debate has caused me to ponder whether the 'irrational' Christian beliefs in love e.g. 1 Jn. 4:7-21, (even of enemies), of the 'sanctity' of human life, of personal forgiveness, and of 'going the second mile' in needful situations, make Christian behaviour incomprehensible to Kantian or popular morality.

A representative group of scientists and lay people in Canberra, helped by the distinguished theologian Dr Graeme Garrett, considered this matter in preparing a paper to inform the clergy and laity of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn.<sup>3</sup> This paper accepted the views of the Andrews commission, that the cloning of people should be banned, but also accepted the need for stem cell and therapeutic research. Their consideration was based not only on scientific, legal and philosophical perspectives, but also on a consideration of the Bible's teaching on humans, made in the image of God, human's stewardship of nature, the effects of sin on human behaviour and of Christ's redemption. I quote from the paper:

From the beginning of the biblical witness, God has been revealed as a God of redemption, concerned with the suffering, sickness and violence of the world. According to scripture, God comes near in healing, saving and peace-giving. Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush sets the stage for the Judaeo-Christian understanding of God as saviour:

Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them ...' (Exodus 3:7)

This redemptive quality of God is fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Whereas the fundamental constitution of human beings as the image of God is often distorted or disfigured (consequent upon sin), Jesus Christ is seen in the New Testament to be the undistorted and unsurpassable reflection of the being of God in human existence (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; 3:10; Hebrews 1:3). Jesus announced the purpose of his life with the words:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19; cf. Isaiah 61:1-11).

These reflections are offered to promote further debate on this important issue. It is an issue that will not go away. Cloning cannot be undiscovered. There may be as yet unforeseen benefits to human health as well as potential moral dangers involving human exploitation.

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*Editor's Note:* Issue 16/1 will contain several responses on the cloning debate and other contributions would be welcome.

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3 <http://www.canberragoulburn.Anglican.org/html/publications/articles/default.htm>