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Cloning

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With animals, cloning is expensive and inefficient - average success rate is just 2 per cent. In addition, many abnormalities occur in those cloned animals successfully brought to term. This raises serious questions about the safety of implanting cells from cloned embryos into humans. How would we know that the cloned embryos to be raided for cells were "normal"?

· The truth is that much of the research in this area is being pursued for commercial rather than medical reasons. Embryo cloning produces factories of bio-medical products which can be marketed very profitably.

· The potential for medical disaster with cloning is enormous. There are obvious parallels with the BSE crisis. Closure and limitation of debate is a grave mistake; slavish following of "expert advice" needs to be questioned. As with BSE decisions risk being taken now without proper knowledge of their long-term effects. There is a danger of passing new illnesses into the system by using cells from cloned embryos.

· Embryo cloning is not necessary. The technology of cloning adult stem cells by-passes any ethical objections. This latter technology is moving fast. Since the Donaldson Report in the summer of 2000 there have been major breakthroughs in using adult stem cells for the same purpose as that envisaged by Donaldson for embryo cells. Studies in Scandinavia and the USA have revealed that adult stem cells would be as effective if not more effective than embryo stem cells in developing new medical treatments.

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CATHOLIC BISHOPS' JOINT BIO-ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR BRITAIN AND IRELAND

CLONING

THE COUNTER-ARGUMENT

MORAL OBJECTIONS

Legalising cloning is crossing a moral Rubicon. It is as significant as legalising abortion or embryo experimentation. Yet this decision has been made without proper public and parliamentary debate

· Moral objections centre on the illicit creation and destruction of human life involved in cloning. First clones are created, then they are harvested for stem cells and finally they are killed. This is an affront to the dignity of the human person, albeit a very young human person.

· Most experts in this field believe that embryo cloning for so-called "therapeutic" purposes will inevitable lead to cloned babies being born. A recent survey in The Independent newspaper showed that most experts working in this field believe in this "slippery slope" theory.

POLITICAL OBJECTIONS

The preparatory process which has led to this issue being debated in parliament has been deeply flawed. The original investigative committees have been populated by individuals who were on the record as favouring human cloning even before they were asked to join the committee. There has been a marked absence, in all the preparatory studies, of voices who recognise the sanctity of human life.

· The Government used the device of the "Affirmative Instrument" in the Commons. This means the proposal to allow cloning was not open to amendment, and was debated to completion in a very limited time. Opponents of cloning were allowed inadequate opportunity to put their case.

· This debate is being conducted using deceptive language. Cloning is referred to in the Donaldson Report as "cell nuclear replacement". When public authorities resort to euphemism they have something to hide.

· The UK risks becoming the pariah state of Europe. The Council of Europe has condemned cloning in all forms. The European Parliament, as recently as September 7 2000, also condemned cloning in all its forms. UK academic institutions defying this ban face major cuts in EU funding. This threat already hangs over Edinburgh University.

SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIONS

Since 1990, when experimentation on embryos was approved by the UK Parliament, one million embryos have been "destroyed or experimented upon" but this has led to no cures for disease, no breakthroughs in infertility treatment, no major scientific breakthroughs. Those proposing cloning also promise great advances, yet the truth is that this is a science at the very earliest stages of development.

· Animal cloning does not bode well for the human variety.