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# Human Cloning in Korea: Does Medicine Have No Moral Limits?

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The project was directed by Dr. Woo Suk Hwang and Dr. Shin Yong Moon of Seoul National University. Joining the two Korean doctors at the final stages of the project was an American scientist, Dr. Jose B. Cibelli. While an American firm, Advanced Cell Technologies, had claimed to be first to clone human embryos, that experiment led to the death of the embryos before stem cells could be extracted. In a Korean experiment, 16 women donated 242 eggs, but produced only one cloned stem cell line. Nevertheless, the fact that the Korean scientists were able to coax an embryo into the blastocyst stage, thus producing the much sought after stem cells, was a scientific milestone. The scientists had used 176 selected eggs, removing the genetic material from the eggs and replacing it with genetic material derived from cumulus cells—cells attached to the egg itself.

According to The New York Times, the cloning experiments took place in Building 85 at Seoul National University. Somewhere in that building, the researchers passed a significant moral and technological barrier—producing the first successfully cloned human embryos. Dr. Leon Kass, chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics, indicated the significance of the announcement. "The age of human cloning has apparently arrived: today cloned blastocysts for research, tomorrow cloned blastocysts for baby making." Kass, a respected philosopher and bioethicist, is an ardent opponent of human cloning in every form. In a statement to The New York Times, Kass spoke for the President's Council on Bioethics in asserting that "the only way to prevent this from happening here is for Congress to enact a comprehensive ban or moratorium on all human cloning."

Of course, the problem is evident in the fact that many American doctors have been working toward the very same goal. Under the guise of medical research, experiments in human cloning have proceeded, with Congress thus far unable to pass a comprehensive ban on human cloning. The majority of medical researchers attempt to distinguish between "therapeutic cloning" intended to produce genetic material for medical treatment, and "reproductive cloning" used to create a cloned human being. While the medical establishment is solidly opposed to reproductive cloning, many researchers are pushing experiments aimed at making therapeutic cloning a mainstay of medicine in the future.

The experiments at Seoul National University were financed by the Korean government. Guidelines established by President George W. Bush in 2001 limit federal research spending in the United States to experimentation on selected existing stem cell lines, and prohibit funding of further research that would involve the destruction of additional human embryos.

Donald Kennedy, editor in chief of Science, the journal that published the Korean report, claimed that the American restrictions are an imposition on science: "I think there is no question that the degree of restriction imposed now on stem

cell research in the U.S. has in fact given other nations some significant advantages.” Other scientists have objected that a preoccupation with ethical questions has prevented American scientists from making more progress in stem cell research.

These researchers reflect the growing mindset among many scientists that imposes the inevitability of human cloning and its applications. In reality, the moral distinction between therapeutic cloning and reproductive cloning is nearly meaningless. The technology used in both forms of cloning is virtually the same. The only difference is in the intended goal of the procedure. Given the developments in Korea, there is no reason to doubt that efforts toward reproductive cloning will take advantage of what the Korean scientists called the “recipe” for human cloning.

The plain fact is that the Korean scientists intentionally created human embryos only to destroy them in an effort to obtain stem cells. The intentional destruction of human embryos reflects the Culture of Death in the guise of white-coated technocrats. Once the sanctity of human life is denied at the embryonic level, human dignity is compromised for all human beings at every stage of life and development. Every single human being began life as an embryo—and was at one point a blastocyst—and thus the creation of embryos intended for destruction is a calculated assault on human life. Of course, the proponents of stem cell research claim that the therapeutic applications of stem cell technology will promise to cure diseases such as Parkinson’s disease, Diabetes, and Alzheimer’s disease, and to develop treatments for neurological injuries and other urgent medical applications. The Korean doctors admit that no therapeutic applications are yet available. As a matter of fact, no therapeutic applications are even on the near horizon. Nevertheless, you can count on advocates of stem cell research to trumpet this development as a harbinger of treatments right around the corner.

Human cloning, therapeutic or otherwise, involves human beings in a moral overreach of truly frightening proportions. The cloning of human beings represents a radical break with the human past and with established patterns of human life. The creation of human embryos for the purposes of obtaining stem cells is a classic example of reducing human life to a product, rather than acknowledging all human life as a gift.

The Korean announcement raises the frightening prospect of embryo “factories” turning out thousands of embryos and their respective stem cell lines. Now that cloned embryos have survived the blastocyst stage, other researchers are certain to apply the Korean methodology in order to produce a cloned baby.

We are pressing the technological barriers to the maximum even as we ignore the moral issues at stake. Dolly, the famous cloned sheep, was born only in 1996. Now, less than 10 years later, a “recipe” for cloned human embryos has announced that the age of human cloning has arrived.

Laurie Zoloth, professor at The Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University, understands something of the Korean experiment’s historical importance. “There is much to reflect on. Here is a technology that we have spent literally years thinking about and theorizing about.” She said “I have taught it and studied it and researched it and been in hundreds of arguments and debates about it. Yet when the thing is actually accomplished, there is still this sense of crossing a critical threshold.”

A critical threshold, indeed. The announcement out of Korea is not just a footnote in the medical journals or a matter of interest only to specialized medical scientists. Human cloning is an effort to redefine what it means to be human and represents the ambition of the creature to claim what rightfully belongs to the Creator alone.

We have entered a new Promethean Age in which medical advances are pushed forward regardless of moral consequences. The Korean announcement is merely a hint of things to come.

