

The debate over human cloning and embryonic stem cell research.

Willettton – Canning Vale Branch Meeting Liberal Party. 9 October 2006.

I am wearing 3 hats tonight. The first one is of a medical practitioner concerned about the direction our country is going in medical science. I also happen to be a Christian and the relevance of that is that it gives me a solid underpinning of my view of human life and the need to uphold truth (but not to preach).

The second hat is of *Medicine With Morality – Australian doctors concerned with the drift of ethics away from moral absolutes* – detail of which you will find on the website. This was formed earlier this year after the RU486 debate when parliament decided to hand over the moral direction of our country to a committee that will not even consider the morality of RU486 but only look at objective scientific evidence of how it does what it does. *Medicine With Morality* has made significant submissions to MPs and to the Senate committee looking at the bills now presented by Senators Kay Patterson and Natasha Stott-Despoja. *Medicine With Morality* paints a broader brush of ethics including end-of-life issues.

The third hat is of *Doctors Against Cloning* an informal grouping of doctors who want to tell the truth about embryo stem cell research and was formed less than 2 weeks ago. A letter has been written to Eastern States newspapers with over 200 signatories.

As medical professionals, we are concerned by the ethical and scientific misconceptions surrounding the cloning debate.

The central ethical misconception is that cloned embryos are not embryos, and therefore creating them for research does not violate research ethics. That is incorrect, since all embryos created naturally or by cloning or by IVF are living human beings capable of further development.

This political strategy to redefine the cloned embryo was formulated last year by the International Society for Stem Cell Research, and was criticized as 'evasive' by the respected journal *Nature* (*Playing the name game: stem cell biologists should not try to change the definition of the word 'embryo'*, July, 2005).

Likewise, for political reasons, the Society decided in 2004 to evade negative feelings about 'cloning' by redefining it as 'SCNT' (somatic cell nuclear transfer). This has confused people into thinking that cloning and SCNT are different scientifically and ethically, when in fact these are two terms for the same process. People need truthful terminology if they are to reach sound ethical conclusions. Cloning (SCNT) does indeed create human embryos solely for research, and that is unethical.

Scientifically, claims about potential benefits from therapeutic cloning have been misleading. For example, Alzheimer's is often raised as potentially curable with stem cells, even though world authorities such as Professor Colin Masters of Melbourne University dismiss such suggestions.

The reality is that no embryonic stem cell treatment has ever been successfully used in humans, for reasons such as tumour formation, while stem cells obtained from adult tissues are safely used in numerous human conditions and for research.

Consequently **DOCTORS AGAINST CLONING** will direct public attention to stem cell research that is both ethical and effective.

Yours sincerely,

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I decided I had to make this presentation a bit more academic and detailed and I am horrified at how big it has become. All I can give you tonight is a summary and I will put the talk onto the www.medicinewithoutmorality.info website for your further consideration.

Websites:

www.cloning.org.au

www.medicinewithmorality.org.au

www.medicinewithoutmorality.info

www.stemcellresearch.org/facts/

Let's look at the conclusion. At the end of the day we could have a conversation like this:

Medical scientist

“OK, you've presented us with all the reasons why cloning does not *need* to happen and *should*

not happen and you may have won that argument (even though we have still bluffed most of the politicians), but we still want to do this research and we don't want you stopping us"

Doctor against Cloning

"Thankyou for being honest about that. Our argument then is that you must not do this because it is wrong to create life with the intention of destroying it. The human embryo is worthy of respect.

All human life matters – we must not devalue human life at any point

In the field of medical science we must not sacrifice one human life for another

The creation of life for destruction is a boundary we must not cross

We must not clone and we must not kill."

Aside to audience

Featured on Starbuck's take-away coffee cups as part of its "The Way I See It" campaign this year was the following by Wesley J. Smith

The morality of the 21st century will depend on how we respond to this simple but profound question:

Does every human life have equal moral value simply and merely because it is human?

Answer yes, and we have a chance of achieving universal human rights.

Answer no, and it means that we are merely another animal in the forest.

Medical scientist

"OK, OK, but we *still* want to do it. This is a new frontier of science. Who knows where it would lead. This would be like trying to stop us going to the moon or stopping Columbus finding the new world."

Doctor against Cloning

"Ah, but we can *tell* you where it would lead. It would lead to the devaluing of human life. We must have solid boundaries to protect human life otherwise we open the door to the discarding of human life at any stage including infanticide and euthanasia.

What the paralysed child in the wheelchair brought out to gain sympathy for destructive embryo research does not realise – and, mercifully, could not comprehend – is that it is her life that is ultimately at risk. We must protect the weak and the vulnerable at all stages of existence.

Already we have strong voices advocating infanticide up till the age of 4-6/52 before the baby becomes self-aware and we know that in Holland the involuntary euthanasia has now extended to infants.

We must practice medicine and medical science with solid ethical principles."

Medical scientist

"But if we don't do this research then we will lose good scientists overseas."

Doctor against Cloning

"Well, if you're always going to use that as your guideline soon we will be doing unheard of things. That would force medical ethics to the lowest common denominator. Do we follow Holland's standards in euthanasia just because Holland is doing it? We in Australia must set a high standard and we believe we can do that and also have great success. In fact we are already achieving a world-class standard."

Now that is where the argument will ultimately take us. So we have momentous choices facing us in this country. Will we go down the hazardous path of medicine without morality eliminating all who we regard as useless or undesirable? Will we sacrifice the weak and vulnerable in order to make a 'strong' society? There are those that firmly believe this is the way to go. And, yes, it has the smell of burning flesh.

So here is the conclusion of the matter: *All human life matters. This is universal truth.*

So, let's go back and look in more detail.

It seems like yesterday yet it was four years ago that we had a historic debate in our nation and in our parliaments. As a result of that debate two acts came into being the likes of which would have seemed very strange to a previous generation. They were the *Prohibition of Human Cloning Act 2002* and the *Research Involving Human Embryos Act 2002*. These were to prohibit human cloning and to allow

research on 'spare' human embryos left over from IVF or ART (Artificial Reproductive Technology). We called them 'spare' because there was no further use for these embryos by their parents – they did not want them implanted to eventually become independent living people.

At that time there was much noise about *we do not need cloning* and *this will not lead to cloning* and we will reflect on this a little later.

Built into the legislation was the need for review. The review committee was established last year with 5 members plus the chairman, the late Justice Lockhart. The committee met and delivered its recommendations in December.

What are those recommendations? Well, in brief they move from the use of 'spare' embryos to the *explicit creation* of embryos for the purpose of destructive research. Worse still they move to the creation of embryos by *cloning* and the mixing of *animal and human genetic material*. And the suggestion is made that we change the definition of embryo to allow *research to occur without breaking the law*.

I want to discuss from several points of view

1. Why the report should be thrown out without even looking at the recommendations
2. The long-term implications of the report
3. Why ESCR is not needed
4. The ethics of human egg collection and the use of animal eggs

1: Why the report should be thrown out without even looking at the recommendations.

- Because it was unrepresentative
- Its illustration of the reality of the *slippery slope*
- The use of language and definitions to mislead
- The role of such committees in determining the moral direction of our country

First and foremost the Lockhart Report should be thrown in the because the panel was hand-picked by pro-cloning State governments to produce a desired result. Half the panel – Professors Kerridge, Schofield and Skene – were already on record in support of human cloning for research. The other members were of the same opinion. By referring in their report to the diversity of opinions in the community on cloning, but reflecting not the faintest trace of this diversity in their own recommendations, the Lockhart panel in effect conceded that they were an unrepresentative group.

Further

- The Lockhart Review relied on fraudulent science. The six month period in which it conducted its inquiry (June-December 2005) coincided exactly with the period in which the whole world was conned into believing that Korean scientists had achieved major breakthroughs in the science of human cloning.
- The Lockhart Review failed to disclose that over 80% of the submissions it received opposed any change to the prohibition on human cloning.
- The Lockhart Review ignored completely the key published paper on Australians attitudes to cloning for research which found that 63% of Australians were not comfortable with scientists using cells created by cloning.
- The Lockhart Review exceeded its brief by revisiting the fundamental ethical issue on whether it was right to create human embryos solely for research. This issue was decided decisively by the Parliament in 2002.

The Lockhart Report should be thrown out because it was biased from its inception.

Secondly the Lockhart Report illustrates the reality of the slippery slope.

The report actually looks at the issue of the *slippery slope*, says it does not apply and then amply illustrates how it does in using one permission or decision to justify another on the grounds of fairness and consistency. On the grounds that we already allow *this* for *this* reason, it says we should allow *that* for *that* reason, and if we allow that then we should allow this *next thing* for this *next reason*. A more brilliant and open example of the slippery slope would be hard to find.

“current ART arrangements *already sanction* the possibility of the destruction of embryos, in the process of helping people to have a family, and hence not to allow embryo destruction to help people with other medical problems *would be unfair*” (Executive Summary p.xiv italics mine).

“Thus, to *permit* one (production and destruction of ART embryos) but not the other (production and destruction of nuclear transfer and other bioengineered embryos) would be *inconsistent* and appear to attach more importance to the treatment of infertility than to the treatment of other diseases and conditions that could be helped as a result of this activity.” (p170)

Some use the ‘law of unintended consequences’ as an alternative description for the slippery slope but this is clearly inadequate as the *additional steps* or extensions of permissions are frequently intended and are perfectly logical – as the report shows – once a solid boundary has been crossed.

But a new boundary is now threatened – one with huge consequences for the future of society – and that is the explicit creation of human life with the deliberate intent of its destruction. Worse still, the creation of this life utilising cloning techniques and also by mixing human and animal genetic material. The report belittles the significance of the cloning step by saying that it was *not a major additional step*.

Therefore, if research on excess ART embryos is permitted, it is *not a major additional step* to permit SCNT (p171).

The report is flawed because it denies and yet illustrates the reality of the slippery slope. This is discussed in more detail on the [medicinewithoutmorality](http://www.medicinewithoutmorality.com) website.

Thirdly, the report uses language and definitions to mislead.

Unbelievably the committee recommended changing the definition of embryo so that it would not be regarded as human

The Committee noted that changing the definition of a human embryo... would allow much of the research described above to occur *without breaking the law* (p167 italics mine)

Associate Professor Wendy Rogers, Department of Medical Education, Flinders University, told the Committee that it was not clear that an SCNT clone should be called an ‘embryo’. *If it were not defined as an embryo, there would not be a problem with creating one.* (!) (p97)

The desire to make the technology ‘respectable’ is also evident further down the same page:

...respondents stressed that the definition of a human embryo clone needs to be *honest and rigorous* but at the same time *flexible* enough to cover all the emerging technologies in this area

OK, it’s still an embryo but let’s disguise it if we can so people won’t know

However, a human embryo clone created to extract stem cells is not intended to be implanted, but is created as *a cellular extension of the original subject*.

And in the argument for SCNT (cloning) the committee concludes

...SCNT *only aims to copy a person’s cells*; therefore... there is no objection to this (p171)

But it is still an embryo, still human and still alive.

Cloning is cloning. There is no difference between a *therapeutic* clone and a *reproductive* clone. The adjectives therapeutic and reproductive describe their future, the former being destined to destruction with the hope that at some future time that destruction may have therapeutic benefit, the latter being destined for life outside the uterus but condemned to death because to be implanted and born is prohibited.

Now people are talking about SCNT Clones as if they are somehow not embryos and in the recent bill tabled by Senator Natasha Stott-Despoja she just refers to SCNT and totally avoids cloning in the title ‘Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer (SCNT) and Related Research Amendment Bill 2006.’

Do you believe this is not having an effect? Well, get this – coming out of an MP’s office within the last few weeks to an elector who made an enquiry was this drivel:

When scientists talk about creating embryos, they don’t mean babies. They are called embryos because technically they could be fertilised and therefore become a baby, but that is banned.

The process is killing a baby isn’t it?

No, because the embryo is a collection of created cells, from one person.

Scientists are currently banned from reproductive cloning and implanting cloned embryos. That will remain in place. An embryo to create a baby needs an egg fertilised by sperm, i.e. from two people. THIS IS NOT ABOUT CREATING CLONED HUMANS. Scientists are not talking about creating a person, but a group of cells.

Why is the word cloning mentioned then?

In this case, cloning the cells means copying them. It does not mean copying a person.

Let’s go on a little flight of fancy. Three boys are talking about their fathers:

My Dad’s does cloning but he calls it SCNT now; that’s somatic cell nuclear transfer.

My Dad’s in gaol for murder, but he calls it SCBT now; that’s skull cranium bullet transfer

My Dad does heroin, but he calls it SCNT now; that’s syringe capillary narcotic transfer.

We therefore make a plea for clarity and truth:

- *Cloning using human cells creates human embryos – fundamental biological, unarguable fact.*
- *SCNT is cloning. SCNT is the technique used to produce the embryo.*
- *An SCNT clone is human life whether we call it an embryo or not. It is human life even when it ‘is not intended to be born’. Let’s tell the truth and call it by its proper name – an embryo.*
- *Cloned embryos produced for research are created to be destroyed. This is an essential part of proposed legislation. We cannot afford to cross the boundary of Creation for Destruction. We cannot afford to practice medicine without morality.*

The report should be thrown out because of its deliberate use of deceitful language.

Fourthly, we should not rely on the expertise of committees such as this for the moral direction of our country

The ultimate result of the RU486 debate was that we handed over the moral direction of our country to a committee that will not even consider the moral direction of our country. The Therapeutic Goods Administration only considers objective medical evidence and does not look at what RU486 actually does in killing a real human being. With RU486 we abdicated our responsibility on the moral compass of our nation.

But the pressure is on for government to simply adopt the Lockhart recommendations. And unlike the body looking at RU486, the Lockhart committee did look at ethical issues even though they came to the wrong conclusions. So there has been a lot of pressure on government to simply adopt the report – *leave it to the expert body, leave it to objective scientific evidence.*

But it is not sufficient for expert committees to determine the future direction of our nation or its moral compass.

For all these reasons the report should be confined to the backroom shelf and left there.

We cannot afford to practice medicine without morality.

2: The long-term implications of going down the track of medicine without morality.

At this time the proposed legislation bans the implantation of all clones and demands their destruction before 14 days. But with the promise of the artificial womb being able to keep the clone alive for many months (and even till 'term') it will only be a matter of time before someone in need of a formed liver will argue that they need the clone for valid therapeutic purposes and as it is going to be destroyed anyway – and has not been implanted – then it is discriminatory to deny them the right to further development of the clone. This has already been argued by Will Saletan in *"The Organ Factory: The Case for Harvesting Older Human Embryos"* and by one of our expatriates Oxford Professor Julian Savulescu

"Indeed, it is not merely morally permissible but morally required that we employ cloning to produce embryos or fetuses for the sake of providing cells, tissues or even organs for therapy"
Should we clone human beings? Cloning as a source of tissue for transplantation.. Journal of Medical Ethics 25.2 (April 1999): p87.

It will be argued that the time limit for embryo destruction be extended on the grounds that the embryo is not an *aware* human person – consistent with the ethics of Professor Peter Singer who argues that destruction is even acceptable up to about six weeks after delivery. Why be limited to an artificially imposed time limit of 14 days? After all, the embryo is not really a person. What difference is there between a 14-day embryo and a 14-week foetus? This would then allow for actual organ transplantation to the clone donor for a disease otherwise untreatable.

It will be argued that parents who have lost a child should have the right to clone that child – particularly if beyond the age of reproduction or in the event of sterilisation.

The right to clone will also be argued in the event of one spouse having a serious hereditary defect and that it is discriminatory not to allow cloning of the un-affected spouse, or even for that matter a single person to argue the *right of parenthood*. The case will be made that to deny them a child is discriminatory in denying them the therapy they badly need.

The key parameter is the value we put on human life. As soon as we start weighing the value of one person against another 'for therapeutic purposes' we have crossed another significant boundary. We could then argue the merits of using a Down's Syndrome child for its liver when this is needed for 'therapeutic purposes'.

Or when we ultimately have – legally or clandestinely – mature cloned beings to argue that it is acceptable to use those designated as *therapeutic clones* for organ transplant purposes because they were created especially for that purpose – as *cellular extensions of the original subjects* – as in the movie *The Island*.

At this point we should be starting to shudder.

Now you might argue against the reality that this sort of progression might occur. We say it is inevitable having crossed solid boundaries. What is not seen to be acceptable at one time becomes acceptable down the track. This progression can of course be seen as a deliberate tactic of what we call gradualism. Once again the evidence is there. Senator Kay Patterson said in 2002 "it is wrong to create human embryos solely for research. It is not morally permissible to develop an embryo with the intent of truncating it at an early stage for the benefit of another human being".

When warned that allowing research on spare IVF embryos would inexorably lead to allowing human cloning for research she said "I believe it is disingenuous to suggest that approving this research will open the door to further killing of living human beings when the Prohibition of Human Cloning Bill 2002 bans the creation of a human embryo for a purpose other than achieving a pregnancy." Her action in tabling her Bill demonstrates her critics then to have been absolutely right

3: Why ESCR is not needed – the fact is that stem cells from non-embryonic sources are doing the job.

The great consolation is that we do not need cloning.

Adult stem cells (ASCs) are already providing the required ‘patient-specific’ stem cells for treatment.

Contrary to popular misconception, embryonic stem cells (ESCs) have never been used in any human condition, while adult stem cells are already safely used in over 70 human conditions.

The tumour tendency of ESCs and genetic damage accumulated in the cloning process makes cloned ESCs dangerous in animals and unthinkable for direct use in humans. By contrast, ASCs are proven to be safe and effective in humans.

Discoveries by teams like Prof Alan Mackay-Sim’s at Griffith University show that adult stem cells from the back of your nose are already being used in exactly the same way as we hear proposed for ESCs from cloned embryos. Not only is it quick and simple to sample some cells from your nose but ASCs are superior for research since they are a true genetic match of the diseased patient.

Now the interesting thing is that people like Professor Alan Trounson – one of the most outspoken scientists pushing for cloning – *no longer* pushes this for stem cell therapy for direct treatment of disease because he knows there is little hope for this. He stated in May 2005 “I don’t call it therapeutic cloning because *it’s not about cells for therapy*. This is about cells that give us an opportunity to discover what causes a disease and whether we can interfere with that.”

What a pity our pro-cloning politicians don’t tell people this. What they also don’t tell you is that pharmaceutical research scientists also want their hands on embryos for drug development and testing.

Cloning is no longer proposed by serious scientists as a means to obtain embryonic stem cells (ESCs) for direct treatment of diseases like diabetes, Parkinson’s and spinal injury. That is being left to adult stem cells (ASCs).

Professor Bob Williamson of the Australian Academy of Science, a supporter of research cloning, stated in January this year: “Nuclear transfer (‘therapeutic cloning’) is *not of importance to give cells to treat patients*; these are far more likely to come from so-called ‘adult stem cells’.”

And the Chief Executive of the Australian Stem Cell Centre, Stephen Livesey (Fin Review 10/9/06): “The reason why scientists want to create a nuclear transfer embryo is for... a safe and sustainable way of testing new drugs and theories.”

4: The ethics of human egg collection and the use of animal eggs

Prof Hwang in South Korea – the one whose research was touted around the world but was subsequently discredited – collected eggs from his junior female research assistants. His claim was that he was able to create 11 human embryos from 2000 eggs but it was found to be completely false. There is evidence to suggest the eggs were obtained by coercion. In UK recently an IVF clinic said it would halve the fees for IVF if the females would donate half their eggs. That kind of manipulation is medicine without morality.

It seems that a vast number of human eggs is needed for the research proposed. It is for this reason that the use of rabbit eggs is promoted and is part of Senator Kay Patterson’s bill. This means that some DNA of the rabbit is mixed with human DNA, but that’s OK, they say, because, just like the cloned embryo, it will be killed. So let’s do something really, really immoral – what was regarded as unthinkable just 4 years ago – and then fix it by carrying out another immoral act and that is to kill the embryo thus formed. How long will it be that scientists here or overseas decide to grow those embryos further in an artificial womb for the sake of further research which will be – according to them – of even greater potential?

Having crossed this 'frankensteinian' boundary there is no limit that can hold. We are sliding further down the slope.

We must not clone; we must not mix human and animal genetic material; and we must not kill.

So where are we?

At the present time the bills are being assessed by the Senate Community Affairs Committee and sometime soon the various submissions will be on the Senate website. The committee will make recommendations as to the adoption of those bills and then they will go to the houses. Then the decision will be up to our MPs.

I strongly suspect that those who are pro-cloning will not change their minds no matter how much we demolish their arguments. They take that position because they have a utilitarian view of human life and so will never agree with the fundamental stance *that all human life matters* and which we regard as *universal truth*.

So what else can we say?

Two things.

Firstly it was just 2 weeks ago that the AMA adopted the World Medical Association's (WMA) *Declaration of Geneva* as a contemporary companion to the 2,500-year-old Hippocratic Oath for doctors to declare their commitment to their profession, their patients, and humanity. This includes the simple statement *I will maintain the utmost respect for human life*.

That's very clear and well expressed. And I hope the nation listens

Finally, Do national leaders have a special responsibility to future generations and to a higher authority to do what is 'right', even if this means going against public opinion?

Does this include a responsibility to be more aware and educated as to the full facts, complexities and ramifications of a particular issue than the general public? Is it enough to simply say that *80% of people are in favour of euthanasia, therefore we should implement it?*

Consider these texts from ancient writings – yes, Biblical but valid nevertheless and attested to by history.

When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth. (2 Samuel 23:3-4)

Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for God. Judge carefully, for with our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery. (2 Chronicles 19:5-7)

Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve God with fear and rejoice with trembling. (Psalm 2:10)

If this responsibility is valid, then it may not only be needful to vote in the right way but also to speak for what is right. It can be argued that this not only ultimately honours the speaker but the nation as well.

Thankyou. Lachlan Dunjey. 9 October 2006.