

The Sanctity of Life in a Brave New World

A Manifesto on Biotechnology and Human Dignity

"Our children are creations, not commodities." President George W. Bush

"If any one age really attains, by eugenics and scientific education, the power to make its descendants what it pleases, all men who live after are the patients of that power," slaves to the "dead hand of the great planners and conditioners." C. S. Lewis

1. The Issue

The debates over human cloning have focused our attention on the significance for the human race of what has been called "the biotech century." Biotechnology raises great hopes for technological progress; but it also raises profound moral questions, since it gives us new power over our own nature. It poses in the sharpest form the question: What does it mean to be human?

2. Biotechnology and Moral Questions

We are thankful for the hope that biotechnology offers of new treatments for some of the most dreaded diseases. But the same technology can be used for good or ill. Scientists are already working in many countries to clone human beings, either for embryo experiments or for live birth.

In December 2002, the Raelians, a religious cult that believes the human race was cloned by space aliens, announced that a baby they called "Eve" was the first cloned human. But it is not just the fringe cults that are involved in cloning; that same month, Stanford University announced a project to create cloned embryos for medical experimentation.

Before long, scientists will also be able to intervene in human nature by making inheritable genetic changes. Biotechnology companies are already staking claims to parts of the human body through patents on human genes, cells, and other tissues for commercial use. Genetic information about the individual may make possible advances in diagnosis and treatment of disease, but it may also make those with "weaker" genes subject to discrimination along eugenic lines.

3. The Uniqueness of Humanity and Its Dignity

These questions have led many to believe that in biotechnology we meet *the* moral challenge of the twenty-first century. For the uniqueness of human nature is at stake. Human dignity is indivisible: the aged, the sick, the very young, those with genetic diseases - every human being is possessed of an equal dignity; any threat to the dignity of one is a threat to us all. This challenge is not simply for Christians. Jews, Muslims, and members of other faiths have voiced the same concerns. So, too, have millions of others who understand that humans are distinct from all other species; at every stage of life and in every condition of dependency they are intrinsically valuable and deserving of full moral respect. To argue otherwise will lead to the ultimate tyranny in which someone determines who are deemed worthy of protection and those who are not.

4. Why This Must Be Addressed

As C. S. Lewis warned a half-century ago in his remarkable essay *The Abolition of Man*, the new capacities of biotechnology give us power over ourselves and our own nature. But such power will always tend to turn us into commodities that have been manufactured. As we develop powers to make inheritable changes in human nature, we become controllers of every future generation.

It is therefore vital that we undertake a serious national conversation to ensure a thorough understanding of these questions, and their answers, so that our democratic institutions will be able to make prudent choices as public policy is shaped for the future.

5. What We Propose

We strongly favor work in biotechnology that will lead to cures for diseases and disabilities, and are excited by the promise of stem cells from adult donors and other ethical avenues of research. We see that around the world other jurisdictions have begun to develop ethical standards within which biotech can flourish. We note that Germany, which because of its Nazi past has a unique sensitivity to unethical science and medicine, has enacted laws that prohibit all cloning and other unethical biotech options. We note that the one international bioethics treaty, the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine, outlaws all inheritable genetic changes and has been amended to prohibit all cloning.

We therefore seek as an urgent first step a comprehensive ban on all human cloning and inheritable genetic modification. This is imperative to prevent the birth of a generation of malformed humans (animal cloning has led to grotesque failures), and vast experimental embryo farms with millions of cloned humans.

We emphasize: All human cloning must be banned. There are those who argue that cloning can be sanctioned for medical experimentation—so-called "therapeutic" purposes. No matter what promise this might hold—all of which we note is speculative—it is morally offensive since it involves creating, killing, and harvesting one human being in the service of others. No civilized state could countenance such a practice. Moreover, if cloning for experiments is allowed, how could we ensure that a cloned embryo would not be implanted in a womb? The Department of Justice has testified that such a law would be unenforceable.

We also seek legislation to prohibit discrimination based on genetic information, which is private to the individual. We seek a wide-ranging review of the patent law to protect human dignity from the commercial use of human genes, cells, and other tissue. We believe that such public policy initiatives will help ensure the progress of ethical biotechnology while protecting the sanctity of human life.

We welcome all medical and scientific research as long as it is firmly tethered to moral truth. History teaches that whenever the two have been separated, the consequence is disaster and great suffering for humanity.

(Signed)

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