

Preface

Human Cloning and Human Dignity: An Ethical Inquiry is the first publication of the President's Council on Bioethics, which was created by President George W. Bush on November 28, 2001, by means of Executive Order 13237.

The Council's purpose is to advise the President on bioethical issues related to advances in biomedical science and technology. In connection with its advisory role, the mission of the Council includes the following functions:

- To undertake fundamental inquiry into the human and moral significance of developments in biomedical and behavioral science and technology.
- To explore specific ethical and policy questions related to these developments.
- To provide a forum for a national discussion of bioethical issues.
- To facilitate a greater understanding of bioethical issues.
- To explore possibilities for useful international collaboration on bioethical issues.

President Bush left the Council free to establish its own priorities among the many issues encompassed within its charter, based on the urgency and gravity of those issues and the public need for practical guidance about them.

The Council had little difficulty in choosing its first topic of inquiry. The ethics of human cloning has been the subject of intense discussion in the United States and throughout the world for more than five years, and it remains the subject of heated debate in Congress. On the surface, discussion has focused on the safety of cloning techniques, the hoped-for medical benefits

of cloning research, and the morality of experimenting on human embryos. But driving the conversations are deeper concerns about where biotechnology may be taking us and what it might mean for human freedom, equality, and dignity.

Human cloning, were it to succeed, would enable parents for the first time to determine the entire genetic makeup of their children. Bypassing sexual reproduction, it would move procreation increasingly under artful human control and in the direction of manufacture. Seen as a forerunner of possible future genetic engineering, it raises for many people concerns also about eugenics, the project to “improve” the human race. A world that practiced human cloning, we sense, could be a very different world, perhaps radically different, from the one we know. It is crucial that we try to understand, before it happens, whether, how, and why this may be so.

Investigating human cloning also provides the Council an important opportunity to illustrate how bioethics can and should deal with those technological innovations that touch deeply our humanity. Here, as elsewhere, the most profound issues go beyond the commonplace and utilitarian concerns of feasibility, safety, and efficacy. In addition, on the policy side, cloning offers us a test case for considering whether public control of biotechnology is possible and desirable, and if so, by what means and at what cost.

The Council commenced deliberations on the topic of human cloning at its first meeting in January 2002, and continued the discussion at its February, April, and June meetings, all held in Washington, D.C. We heard presentations on the recent cloning report of the National Academy of Sciences; on human stem cell research, embryonic and adult; on the ethics of embryo research; and on international systems of regulation of embryo research and assisted reproductive technologies. We received a great deal of public comment, oral and written. All told, we held twelve ninety-minute conversations on the subject.

Recognizing “the complex and often competing moral positions” on biomedical issues, President Bush specified in creating the Council that it need not be constrained by “an overriding concern to find consensus.” In this report we have chosen not to be so constrained. We have not suppressed disagreements in search of a single, watered-down position. Instead, we have presented clear arguments for the relevant moral and policy positions on multiple sides of these difficult questions, representing each as fairly and fully as we can. As a result, the reader will notice that, on some of the matters discussed in the report, Members of the Council are not all of one mind. Members are united, though, in endorsing the worthiness of the approach taken and the importance of the separate arguments made. Accordingly, the Council is unanimous in owning the entire report and in recommending all its discussions and arguments for serious consideration.

Readers interested in delving further into this subject may wish to consult the Bibliography, which includes all of the documents referred to within the report, and also the verbatim transcripts of our meetings, posted at our website (www.bioethics.gov).

It was in his remarks to the nation on federal funding of embryonic stem cell research, on August 9, 2001, that President Bush first declared his intention to create this Council. At the end of that speech, the President said:

I will also name a President's council to monitor stem cell research, to recommend appropriate guidelines and regulations, and to consider all of the medical and ethical ramifications of biomedical innovation. . . . This council will keep us apprised of new developments and give our nation a forum to continue to discuss and evaluate these important issues. As we go forward, I hope we will always be guided by both intellect and heart, by both our capabilities and our conscience.

It has been our goal in these pages—and shall remain our goal in the future—to live up to the President's high hopes and noble aspirations.

LEON R. KASS, M.D.
Chairman