

## Life or lifestyle? The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill

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Last year, US scientists created clones of adults, including one of the scientists concerned. Asked how it felt to look at embryos who were replicas of himself, Dr Samuel Wood said 'I have to admit, it's a very strange feeling. It is very difficult to look at an embryo and realise it is what you were a few decades ago. It is you, in a way'.

The clones were, all too predictably, destroyed by the musing self-reproducer – who did, at least, acknowledge the scientific truth, undisputed by human embryologists, that we all begin as embryos. As such, we already have our own objective interests: something tacitly assumed by doctors in the case of any 'wanted' pregnancy. Only in the case of unwanted embryos, or those wanted only for experimental purposes, are these interests wholly disregarded.

We are bodily beings – living human organisms – even if, for believers, the organism does include a spiritual dimension. All of us can look back on the embryo - however created and with whatever cells - and say 'this is where I began'. Sadly, postnatal rights and interests of children are also at stake in the HFE Bill, where they are sidelined in favour of perceived rights and interests of adult human beings.

Our society is heavily consumerist – perhaps more so than any previous society. We carry this consumerism into our approaches to health care, human life, and parenthood. In the HFE Bill, children are for adults, not adults for children. The desire of same-sex couples to be parents comes before the rights of children to be raised by a male role-model (and indeed, their own genetic father). The desire of parents to treat a sick sibling comes before a child's right to be welcomed unconditionally from the very start of his/her life – not merely as a source of useful tissue.

The logic of production is freely carried out in the treatment of manufactured embryos, though tellingly the State wants some control over the kind of offspring parents may accept. The sinister concept of the 'permitted' embryo, and the permission for embryos to be 'preferred' for transfer as healthy, but not as sick or disabled, are obvious examples. Not everyone is welcome in the libertarian Brave New World.

The brutal disregarding of the respect and reverence due to human procreation is continued in allowing human material to be used to substitute for animal sperm or ova or their parts. Whatever the risk of creating actual human embryos – which depends on the specific technique – it devalues human procreation to interact this way with animal reproductive processes.

What can be done? We can fight for amendments that prohibit abuses, or mitigate their effects – without, however, telling anyone how to plan, or carry out, such abuses. An example would be birth certificates, which can and should record donor conception, for the benefit of any child conceived. At the end of the line, we can oppose the Bill, braving

any repercussions this involves, and supporting others with any repercussions they experience. And, of course, we can pray.

*This article was first published in Christian Politics.*