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## **BIOETHICS DISCUSSION GROUP**

### **Meeting of 29 September 1997**

#### **CLONING**

1. We first need to clearly define cloning. There is confusion even in ethical circles between “cloning” and “twinning”. There are several methods that can be used for cloning (from an adult cell, from a cell at an early stage of development, etc.).

2. In the case of Dolly the sheep, note that there were 277 attempts, including 29 positive fusion results, which resulted in a single Dolly the sheep! Again, it should be stressed that the process uses an aged cell (the DNA may be damaged): it will not be possible to assess the consequences for three or four generations. The risk factor is therefore high.

3. Analysing cloning from an ethical standpoint, we note:

- The debatable character of its objectives (at least in relation to humankind)
- The fundamental change to human relations
- The search for an asexual system of human reproduction.

On 24 June 1997, the Vatican reacted negatively to cloning, placing the emphasis on the profound social transformation that the process would create: a clone has no parents. The right to diversity disappears. Love is removed from human relations. The child becomes an object of the law, whereas before it was the subject of the law! The Roslin Institute that created Dolly is continuing its research under the very aptly named programme: “Orphan industrial products”.

4. Note also that, using this process, we forget the role of sexuality and the link between sexuality and children. Moreover, we no longer transmit life in general, but a life. It is an egotistical choice: we strictly reproduce ourselves. We neglect the opportunity for renewal and we compromise evolution! By cloning, we make a gene more fragile and we could make a group more fragile. We degrade the quality of life and destroy diversity!

5. What arguments are put forward by those who support cloning?

- the possibility of reproducing organs for transplantation, organs that will not be rejected;
- the possibility of reproducing oneself and therefore extending one's life into the future;
- the possibility of avoiding hereditary diseases (on the contrary, we believe that this could favour diseases);
- the possibility of practising eugenics starting with particularly promising material.

6. Since we live in a pluralist world, the Bioethics Discussion Group believes that, putting aside any apologist argument, we need to reflect in order to identify the rational arguments

that illustrate the need to prohibit cloning. If we abandon the field, nothing will stop science going forward.

7. Scientific research is commendable, but what are the limits? What price do we have to pay? What are the real aims and the means employed?

- Humans cannot do what they want.
- We cannot compromise either evolution or diversity.
- We cannot fundamentally change the family relationship and create orphans.
- We must respect what is “human”, “the goodness of humanity” and “the humanity of man”. This “humanity” concerns the specific nature of human beings as opposed to other living things.
- When research is destructive towards humans, it must be prohibited!
- Even in the field of animal cloning, questions need to be asked. In these cases, we also compromise the environment (“alteration of nature”). This goes against the general interest and therefore against ethics.

8. When we identify a certain movement in the positions taken by the National Ethical Committee in France, we note how easy such changes of direction are – and how worrying. To know at what moment we place “humanity” in danger, we need to come to a clear agreement on what essential values should be safeguarded. Even if the manner in which they are protected varies over time and as science progresses, the values themselves never change. We must refuse to accept a purely technical and scientific vision. By acting in this way, scientists are not guilty of abdication – quite the contrary – they score a victory.