

## "CLONING and HARM" at the INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON THEORETICAL AND APPLIED ETHICS

On February 21<sup>st</sup>, the "International Symposium on Theoretical and Applied Ethics," held in Baton Rouge, presented a session at the LSD Union entitled "Cloning and Harm," which considered a theoretical situation in which a lesbian pair that wanted a baby genetically related to both of them was turning to human cloning as a means of doing so. The theoretical proposition, presented by authors Brian Weatherson and Sarah McGrath, was that the state should not criminalize such an approach to the problem. Robert Chasuk, M.D., Associate Director of the Family Medicine Residency Program at Baton Rouge General Medical Center, and a *Hippocratic Resource* member, was invited to comment formally on the presentation. The following are excerpts from his remarks, which avoided the minefield of the initial setting, and got right to the core of the issue, i.e. the cloning of a human. Unfortunately, our space does not permit presentation of the proponents' arguments, but their gist should be evident from Dr. Chasuk's comments.

"The authors main argument centers on issues regarding the safety of cloning to the cloned child ... [yet] ... argues against the conclusion of the President's Council on Bioethics 2002 report, entitled "Human Cloning and Human Dignity," in which it is stated that 'There seems to be no ethical way to try to discover whether cloning-to-produce-children can become safe now or in the future.' [Although] critical of the concerns of the Council ... [the authors of the presentation]... do not challenge the scientific facts that are the basis for these concerns. As the Council points out, "In multiple experiments involving six of the mammalian species cloned to date, more than 89% of the cloned embryos transferred to recipient females did not come to birth, and many of the live -born cloned animals are or become abnormal." [The Council] state further that "a substantial portion of live -born clones have suffered complications that proved fatal fairly quickly" and "premature aging, immune system failure and sudden unexplained death have already become apparent in some cloned mammals .... The Council also noted "concerns that a donor nucleus from an individual who has lived for some years may have accumulated genetic mutations that - if the nucleus were used in cloning of a new human life - may predispose the new individual to certain sorts of cancer and other diseases." ... "Even Ian Wilmut, the lead researcher of the "Dolly" cloning group ...[has stated] ...'The widespread problems associated with clones have led to questions as to whether any clone was entirely normal. There is abundant evidence that cloning can and does go wrong , and ... [there is] ... no justification for believing that this will not happen with humans." "Gene defects emerge in all animal clones...."

Dr. Chasuk went on to state that "Safety in human experimentation is an important issue in human cloning, but not the only one, and not as important as the threat that even a perfected cloning technology poses to human dignity. Yet ... the authors begin by dismissing .. what they consider a ... "fairly weak" argument... [including] ...its threat to human dignity. ...[However,]... the Council states eloquently, "Because of the way we are generated, each of us is at once (1) equally human, (2) equally marked by and from birth as mortal, (3) equally enmeshed in a particular familial nexus of origin, (4) equally individuated in our trajectory from the beginning to the end of our lives - and if all goes well, (5) equally capable (despite our mortality) of participating with a complementary other in the very same renewal of human possibility through procreation."

"Cloning threatens the dignity of human life ..." [and] ..."deprived of this dignity, children become the projects of parental will rather than the gifts to be unconditionally and gratefully received. This leads to the ... probability of children accepted according to certain desired criteria and being made for specific purposes.... In fact, already we have even fertile couples using *in vitro* fertilization, along with preimplantation genetic diagnosis of living embryos, to select the preferred sex of their offspring and to reject living embryos that don't meet their criteria.... Once children are made and not begotten ... there is nothing to argue against ... the manufacture of human beings according to the dominant political, financial, military or eugenic purposes, even if it would deny the right of these children to their own dignity and freedom."

Dr. Chasuk concluded by saying that the authors did not "...present any compelling arguments in support ... of extending ... [a right to privacy in reproductive decisions] ... to the asexual, technological technique of cloning .../and that "their reliance on legal precedent... [regarding privacy] ... is an unfortunate disordering of the law over ethics. Laws protecting immoral acts do not make those acts moral. Ethics should guide law and not the other way around." His comments were very well received! Congratulations and Thank you!!