



## Making Embryos Out of Cells

A scientist working in Cambridge and California has just announced that she and her colleagues have made a 'synthetic human embryo'. They took a human embryonic stem cell line and used it to make what looks like an early human embryo. This 'synthetic human embryo' has been cultivated past the legal limit for experimenting on human embryos in the United Kingdom, which is 14 days.

If this really is an embryo, and it looks a bit like one, then this is a new way of generating an embryo without fertilisation. If cells from an adult could be used, then synthetic embryos would be a new form of cloning. This would be wrong for all the same reasons that the old way of cloning a person (the cloning used to make Dolly the sheep) was wrong. It fails to respect the dignity of human procreation. It fails to respect the dignity of the human being in the first stage of our development. It instrumentalises a human person destroying him or her in lethal scientific experimentation.

This is being reported as though it were a scientific breakthrough but it is not clear what has been achieved, if anything. We should also be very sceptical of claims that this kind of research will help understand or treat genetic diseases. Similar claims are made every time a scientist wants to push the ethical boundaries but we should remember what happened on such occasions, for example, the purported promise of saving 150 lives each year by allowing 'three parent' IVF.

Extraordinary claims were also made about animal-human hybrid embryos being the supposed doorway to cures for every disease from Parkinson's and Motor Neurone Disease to Alzheimer's, but these were cruel and empty promises, hype not hope, and once legalised, this avenue of research was quickly abandoned. The bigger and more general the claims the more we should be sceptical. A cure-all cures nothing.

A synthetic embryo is not a 'model' of an embryo, it is an attempt to make an embryo. If this attempt is successful, scientifically, then it will be wrong ethically, but if it is not successful scientifically then it will not be able to tell us much about normal human development. So far they have not succeeded even in mice in getting 'synthetic embryos' to develop to birth. So perhaps this is not an embryo but an uninteresting clump of cells. On the other hand, if we have any doubt then the embryo-like being should be given the benefit of the doubt.

We all began life as an embryo and to manufacture, experiment on and destroy human embryos is to manufacture, experiment on and destroy human beings. It is unjust. We should not be trying to make human embryos in this way.

**END**

**Notes to Editors:**

- Any part of the above can be quoted as coming from our Director, Professor David Albert Jones.
- For more information on the Anscombe Bioethics Centre, see our website: [www.bioethics.org.uk](http://www.bioethics.org.uk).
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