



BIOETHICS

Anticlone Forces Launch Second-Term Offensive

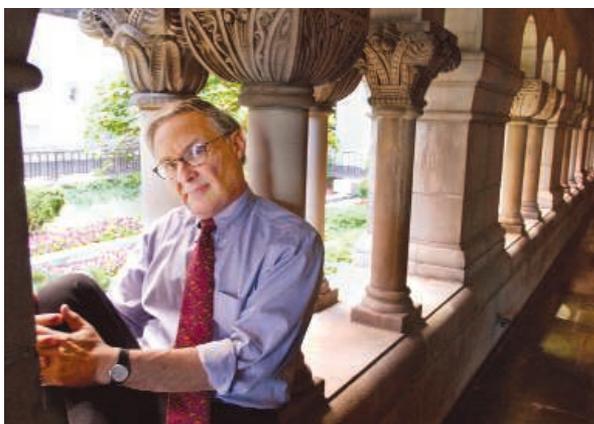
The once-solid political coalition in the United States that opposes any form of human cloning is showing signs of splintering over strategy. Supporters of cloning research are paying close attention to the rift, first reported in the *Washington Post* last week, wondering whether it may work to their advantage or lead to new laws restricting research that stretches ethical boundaries.

One camp, led by Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) and pro-life groups, seeks to renew the fight to pass a comprehensive ban on all cloning of human embryos. Brownback, who plans to reintroduce legislation this week, and others have tried to capitalize on the near-universal aversion to the notion of cloning a human to also ban the use of somatic cell

nuclear transfer (SCNT) to create early-stage embryos for research. Citing SCNT's potential to elucidate and perhaps treat diseases such as Parkinson's, research and patient groups have thwarted such legislative efforts to date.

In recent months a new camp has emerged, led by Leon Kass, chair of the President's Council on Bioethics, and Eric Cohen, editor of the conservative bioethics journal *The New Atlantis*.

Frustrated that Congress has repeatedly failed to pass anticloning measures, they call for a broader ban on novel reproductive approaches, including cloning humans. Arguing that seman-



Private citizen. Leon Kass says he is pushing for new legislation as a private citizen, not as head of the President's Council on Bioethics.

tics have trumped ethics in the cloning debate thus far, they also want to "delink" restrictions on novel reproduction from those on research cloning by dealing with them in separate bills—an approach that those in favor of research cloning have advocated in the past.

One of several position papers Kass and others have discussed during informal meetings, recently posted on a Web site,* calls first

for legislation that would protect "the Dignity of Human Procreation." It seeks to ban reproductive cloning and other procedures including transferring a human embryo into an animal or using sperm or eggs from fetuses to create a child. A "ban on all human cloning does nothing to prevent other ways of making children that would be unwise or unethical," explains Cohen. (An aide to Brownback says the senator will introduce additional legislation soon that would outlaw ethically questionable reproductive methods.)

The document recommends lobbying for a second law that would ban "the creation of any human embryo [through cloning or IVF] solely for research and destruction." It's this tactic, in particular, that has divided the two anticloning camps. Brownback and others say that delinking reproductive and research cloning would give supporters of research cloning a political advantage. "Tactically, [the first] might pass, and you would weaken the case for the other," says David Prentice, senior fellow at the conservative Family Research Council.

Others say the new proposals are unlikely to change the political deadlock. "Congress could pass a ban on reproductive cloning with or without these other prohibitions, and we're going to stay divided on the research cloning," says Kathy Hudson, director of the Johns Hopkins University Genetics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

But Kass argues in an e-mail that a clarified debate on basic morals could win "a very broad range of people, left and right"—including support from scientists. "Far from undermining the

* blog.bioethics.net/2005/03/kass-agenda-bioethics-for-second-term.html

U.N. Settles on Nonbinding Resolution

In an attempt to break nearly 4 years of deadlock, the United Nations General Assembly passed a nonbinding resolution last week urging member countries to draft laws that forbid human cloning. However, the vague wording of the measure and the fact that it doesn't require countries to act means it will have little impact, either on attempts to clone humans or on researchers who hope to use nuclear transfer techniques, which involve the creation of a cloned embryo, as part of research into disease.

The text, which was approved on 8 March, says member states are "called upon to prohibit all forms of human cloning inasmuch as they are incompatible with human dignity and the protection of human life." Representatives from countries that had pushed for a ban on all human nuclear transfer experiments, whether for reproductive or research purposes, called the vote a victory. But if it is a victory, it is a

hollow one, says Christian Much, legal adviser at the German mission to the United Nations. "This will be forgotten 6 months from now," he says. "It was the cheap way out after countries realized there was no way to reach a consensus."

A German and French proposal to draft an international ban on attempts to clone a human received wide support in 2001. But efforts to draft a treaty fell apart when the United States and several other countries insisted that any treaty must ban so-called therapeutic cloning, in which nuclear transfer technology is used to create lines of embryonic stem cells for research. But in a mirror of the stalemate that has scuttled U.S. legislation on the issue (see main text), countries with laws permitting human nuclear transfer research, including the United Kingdom, said they would not endorse such a treaty. Three years of debate followed, ending in deadlock (*Science*, 29 October 2004, p. 797). The final vote on the nonbinding resolution was 84 in favor to 34 against, with 37 abstentions.

—GRETCHEN VOGEL

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