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DEATH IS THE ANSWER

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Paul Greenberg's recent column on Senate Bill 1520, the Human Cloning Ban Act, exposes once again the gradual drift in America toward a culture of death and despair in which death is embraced and life is cast aside.

Death is the answer for violent crime. Death is the answer for a failed marriage. Death is the answer for a job lost. Death is the answer for terminal illness. Death is the answer for a broken love affair. Death is the answer for looting. Death is the answer for an unwanted pregnancy. Death is the answer for terrorism. Death is the answer for a life devoid of meaning. Death is the answer for angry words exchanged in traffic.

Increasingly, death is formally embraced in the law of the land: capital punishment, "shoot to kill," justifiable homicide, abortion, physician-assisted suicide, temporary insanity. Television and motion pictures sensationalize and rationalize killing and mayhem by such contemporary fictional characters as Dirty Harry, Rambo, Martin Riggs, James Bond, Crocodile Dundee, and John McClane, and by such real human beings as Jack Kevorkian, Lt. William Calley at My Lai, various law enforcement agents who attacked and killed the Branch Davidians in Waco and the Randy Weaver family in Ruby Ridge, Francine Hughes who burned her abusive husband to death with gasoline, and Roswell Gilbert who shot to death his stricken wife.

Senate Bill 1520 adds a new twist to this cultural drift toward death and despair. It bans *implanting* the cloned embryo in a uterus or its functional equivalent but not *creating* the embryo. Stem cells taken from the embryo may prove to be effective in treating many different human diseases and debilitating conditions. However, scientists know full well that adult stem cells and stem cells taken from the umbilical cord following birth already are being used for this purpose, and for that reason it is simply unnecessary to clone embryos in order to promote this kind of experimental research and treatment.

What cloned embryos are uniquely suited for is implanting and creating human life, an exact copy of another human being. Strictly speaking the ban on implanting the cloned embryos in Senate Bill 1520 can be lifted by Congress through action taken later that would win favor among legislators on the grounds that since it is possible to design human life according to some biological blueprint that would eliminate certain human defects and diseases it is a moral imperative to do so in the name of human progress and well-being, just as the ban on physician-assisted suicide has been lifted in Oregon and elsewhere in the world in the name of relieving human suffering.

Implanting cloned embryos, however, means that human life is the product of a manufacturing process and as with other manufactured products is subject necessarily to careful quality inspection in order to assure that those who do not measure up are removed. And, as everyone in high-tech manufacturing knows, quality control drives quality improvement. Once again death is the answer to defective human beings as it once was with Nazi medicine. A new branch of medicine emerges that we might call *manufactrics* that is driven by the same logic as physician-assisted suicide that could be called *terminatrics*. In legal reasoning and terminology all of this could be permitted on the same argument used in *Roe v. Wade*. Defective human beings are not entitled to the full protection of the law because they are not persons in the eyes of the law. Thus, the prohibition on taking their lives that has been in place for centuries need not be upheld.

Whenever human life no longer is regarded as sacred, even when it comes with such serious defects such as spinal bifida and hydrocephalus, human history teaches that ways will be found to destroy it and to justify the destruction.

References

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