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EDITORIAL

All of Life Is Here

It may be thought unwise to modify ‘All of life is there’ — the motto of a once popular but now defunct newspaper to head this editorial, but the papers that have come together for this particular issue form an obvious chronological thread in which all of life is here from before conception to the deferring of death.

Hallich’s paper revisits the inter-related questions of whether sperm donors have a *prima facie* right to anonymity and whether parents using donated sperm should disclose to any resulting children the circumstances of their birth. He concludes that the donor’s *prima facie* right to anonymity does indeed exist but is outweighed by considerations relating to any resulting child’s wellbeing. Anonymity also crops up in connection with a more recent dilemma in reproductive medicine in MacKellar’s paper. He contends that the UK law ensuring anonymity for egg and sperm donors for children conceived by maternal spindle or pro-nuclear transfer is also against the child’s best interest. It is certain even if healthy children born from these techniques are prevented from knowing who donated their mitochondrial DNA, that if any of them subsequently develop severe complications which may be attributable to their conception, that the lawyers representing them for damages may well press for donor anonymity to be removed. Over the years the law has slowly eroded the rights of donor anonymity in sperm donation and it is likely to occur with anonymity for gamete donors for these new techniques as well.

The ongoing moral ambiguity of the status of human embryo takes on a new twist for Cherkassky, whose paper explains her view that the 14 day rule does not adequately justify the destruction of non-matching healthy embryos created to provide a bone marrow tissue match for a sick sibling. Though Cherkassky does not argue against the destruction of such embryos, she is concerned that the current law is not sufficient to specifically permit their destruction. The existing law she suggests ‘does not justify the social destruction of healthy non-matching embryos created for a specific social purpose’ which she states ‘looks to be the beginning of eugenics’. She proposes a new provision to be enacted under the Abortion Act 1967. However increasing pressure to both extend the time period of the 14 day rule and to decriminalise abortion altogether add further urgency in evaluating her arguments to clarify the law in this sensitive area.

Even at later stages of life, our genetic profile continues to elicit new dilemmas and Daws’ paper on the growing understanding of the genetics of schizophrenia, indicates the complexities of disclosure of ‘at risk’ findings in this group of patients.

As he points out,

If an individual is told they are at an increased likelihood for schizophrenia, they will indeed worry about developing schizophrenia in the future. But in addition, they are also being told that at that very moment they are likely to have deficits in working memory, reaction time, executive function and social cognition.

This same dilemma of disclosure will surely apply to other disorders as genomics and personalised medicine expand.

Perhaps what we need to find ways of respecting patient autonomy in such disclosures is to consider alternatives to Western approaches to ethics. Life includes East as well as West and Tan gives us some insight into Asian aspects of autonomy in his paper from Malaysia. ‘Can the best interests of the family or the community sometimes be more important and can these be determined by someone other than the patient?’ he asks and he is talking about competent patients here. Not the first question that arises in many Western bioethics classes when discussing autonomy.

Maybe if we could just outgrow our old-fashioned human nature, we could crack some of these problems? In the final article, Thompson weighs some transhumanist ethical aspirations in his Christian balance and finds them wanting, concluding that ‘“techno salvation” — the attempt to make us more moral through biotechnology is a vain hope.’ Thompson is not the first to question the wisdom of rage against death — ‘Of all the wonders that I yet have heard, / It seems to me most strange that men should fear, / Seeing that death, a necessary end, / Will come when it will come’.¹

Finally we too at *The New Bioethics* keenly feel the reality of death at this time as we mark the sad loss of our review editor, Rodney Taylor, since the publication of our last issue by publishing a tribute to him. He will be sorely missed, not just for his work for the journal but even more for his friendship. We are grateful to Toni Saad for taking over the role from Prof Taylor and for the book reviews in this issue covering human nature, the FDA and biological determinism.

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¹ Shakespeare, W. *Julius Caesar* (II, ii, 32–37).