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## EDITORIAL

## New Lamps for Old?

In his analogy of the cursed lamp, Simkulet (2017) provides a powerful parable about making wishes for purely personal gain on a magic lamp, once we become aware that doing so would allow ‘terrible harm to befall others’. Knowledge of resulting harm compels us to change our behaviour. Similarly, once aware of the high frequency of spontaneous abortions, those who believe that early embryos have the same moral status as adults are morally obligated to direct their energies at preventing this serial killing ‘of more human beings than have ever been born’. To do otherwise, would be ‘morally monstrous’, he concludes.

In the Essay in this issue, Blackshaw and Rodger attempt to rehabilitate this alleged moral monstrosity by demonstrating that the principal causes of spontaneous abortion are chromosomal defects which are currently unpreventable and as the other major cause of prenatal death is induced abortion, those who hold to a substance view of the early embryo are not inconsistent moral monsters in continuing to view induced abortion as unethical.

Of course the essentialist view has ramifications which are not just confined to the ethics of abortion. It is unsurprising therefore that essentialism crops up again in MacKellar’s paper concerning whether mitochondrial modification techniques merely alter the characteristics of an existing human being or whether they result in the creation of a new numerically distinct individual. He suggests the latter is likely to be the case and these procedures arguably therefore may be in breach of the European Union *Charter of Fundamental Rights*. Mitochondrial gene manipulation techniques may be a ‘new lamp’ to be cautious about wishing too much upon.

CRISPR- Cas 9 is another such technology. Certainly there was plenty of caution, not to mention criticism, expressed at the announcement of Chinese scientist Prof He Jiankui last November that he had successfully altered the genomes of twin baby girls to make them more resistant to HIV infection – a trait they will pass down the generations in due course. Francis Collins, director of the US National Institutes of Health along with Carrie D. Wolinetz (2019), the NIH associate director for science policy, called together for a moratorium on germline editing. They are joined in this issue by Jennifer M Gumer of Columbia University, who argues that even when countervailing therapeutic benefits of germline CRISPR- Cas9 genome editing are taken into account, the concomitant risks associated with enhancement use of the technology still prevail over any possible gains and there should be ‘an international ban on all germline editing’.

Perhaps religious perspectives may have some insights to offer on the ethical dilemmas around the new lamp of genomic editing? Padela and Aparicio carried

out a systematic literature review to investigate and found some evidence that they might. They conclude that their paper ‘offers a framework through which, and demarcates where, religious perspectives may add value and insight into genetics debates and policy deliberations’.

In the final two papers of this issue, Maguire and Hughton reconsider from Western and Japanese perspectives respectively, the diagnosis of brain death, which still causes controversy decades after the concept has been widely accepted across the world. Maguire controversially concludes despite its general adoption in clinical practice, that ‘brain stem death cannot be successfully equated with either biological death or the loss of integrated bodily function. The overemphasis of the brain-stem and its consequences leaves it open to significant philosophical critique’. Hughton, questioning the efficacy of Western norms in changing behaviour in organ donation in Japan, argues that

‘the Japanese concept of *ningen* could be helpful in not only partially clarifying some of the attitudes that exist in Japan towards the notion of brain death, but also to illustrate the need to recognize the plurality of views in modern bioethics.’

Some Western ‘lamps’ can also cause concerns at the end of life as much as its beginning.

Regular subscribers and readers of the journal may notice we have another newcomer to the editorial board in the person of Dr Mary Neal, Deputy Head of the Law School at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. Dr Neal has also guest edited the next issue of the journal which will be on the theme of conscientious objection in medicine and healthcare. You will hear more from her in her guest editorial introducing the September issue.

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