



Half Human, Half Animal?

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British scientists a few years ago received a green light from their regulatory agency to use cloning technology to make embryos out of human and animal parts. By injecting a human nucleus (the "human genetic package") into a cow egg that has had its own genetic package taken out, a defective human embryo (called a "hybrid" embryo) can be created. The hybrid embryo can be destroyed a few days later to get its stem cells.

This bizarre project of creating maimed human embryos by using cow eggs is being promoted because of the difficulty of getting women to agree to donate their eggs. Most women balk at the idea of handing over their own eggs so that scientists can use them for cloning experiments. Not only is the procedure for obtaining eggs invasive, painful and dangerous for women, but they often feel a natural protectiveness towards their own eggs, their fertility, and any children they might engender.

This instinct to "protect our own" is deeply rooted not only in human beings, but throughout the animal kingdom, and only the most cursory ethical reflection is needed to grasp the moral problem with creating human offspring in laboratories, using an admixture of cow components, in order to scientifi-

cally cannibalize them.

The natural instinct to protect one's embryonic offspring is seen quite forcefully in the case of the Emperor Penguin. The story of the breeding habits of Emperor Penguins has fascinated millions in the big-screen movie, *March of the Penguins*. These animals find one mate, to whom they are singularly faithful, and each female lays one softball-sized egg, which she hands over to the male.

Through shrieking windstorms and weeks of winter darkness, the male carefully balances the egg containing the growing embryonic penguin on the tops of his feet, where there is an apron of densely-feathered flesh which seals out the deadly cold. That egg remains on his feet for more than 60 days, and during that period, the male eats nothing and loses up to half of his own body weight. If the egg should happen to fall out of its protective hutch, it can freeze solid on the polar ice in a matter of minutes. After hatching, an emperor chick spends its first two months nestled within its mother's or father's belly pouch, where the temperature hovers at a protective 96.8 degrees Fahrenheit. Parents take turns caring for the

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young chick, feeding it regurgitated food until it eventually becomes ready to exit from its secret hutch and face the brutal elements of Antarctica.

The incredible solicitude of the Emperor Penguin for its own pre-born offspring, scrupulously protecting them even in their most vulnerable embryonic stages, is a powerful testament to the proper order of creation, where older members of the species naturally go to great lengths to assure the safety and well-being of younger members.

Part of the progress of human civilization over the centuries has been in a similar protection for the young, where children have come to be seen as a sacred trust, an end in themselves, and not merely a means for the satisfaction of parental (or scientific) desires. Father Raymond de Souza has summarized the matter well:

“It is a hallmark of Western civilization that children are to be seen as good in their own right, persons with rights and dignity entrusted to the care of their parents. This is such a commonplace idea that we do not stop to consider it a great

civilizational achievement, but it is. In the ancient world both infanticide and child sacrifice were not rare, and in general the legal status of the child was akin to other property in the household. It was the long painstaking work of centuries - drawing upon both religious and civil resources - to arrive at the cultural and legal consensus that the child does not exist as an object for the benefit of others, but that the child must be treated as a subject for his own sake.”

Today, however, we are being powerfully tempted to subvert these primary intuitions and instincts by destructively removing our young from the protective harbor of the womb via abortion, and by going even further and desecrating our own embryonic children as objects for scientific aggrandizement, treating them as repositories for deriving spare parts or stem cells.

One reason that *The March of the Penguins* was such a hit was because of the way it highlighted the kind of parental love, protection, and sacrifice to which each of us naturally is drawn. The destruction of our own through embryonic stem cell research

— as much as some might wish to cloak it in terms of techniques such as “hybrids” — represents a reversion to the barbarism of former ages.

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