



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

**RESEARCH INVOLVING
EMBRYOS AND PROHIBITION
OF HUMAN CLONING BILL 2002**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 28 August 2002

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Katter, Bob, MP

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Mr KATTER (Kennedy) (5.10 pm)—I think there is a time to handle issues with sensitivity and there is a time to call a spade a spade. My initial reaction to the Research Involving Embryos and Prohibition of Human Cloning Bill 2002 was to call a spade a spade. I said that in all of human history experiments have been done on animals before those experiments are carried out on humans. Since one could use adult cells, as has been done with Parkinson's disease with adult brain cells to some benefit—I would not like to say that they have come to some cure of Parkinson's disease but there have most certainly been some hopeful signs—why are these people not working with adult cells or with animal cells? The only reason I can come up with is that there are a lot of people who are pretty keen on becoming Dr Moreau or Dr Frankenstein. We read a lot about them in the very famous book *Brave New World*. That being the case, I think they should be stopped immediately.

Subsequently I read an article in the *Canberra Times* by Sir Gustav Nossal and a number of other articles. It seemed to me, and it was argued, that since these cells have the ability to grow and are genetically uncoded there were some very real possibilities, and possibilities that I most certainly would have to look at seriously. I remember Napoleon Bonaparte's famous comment when he took control of France and most of Europe. They asked him whether he was going to continue the cult of reason, which was Rousseau's replacement for the Christian religion. Bonaparte is said not to have even looked at the departmental official that asked the question when he said, 'Don't be ridiculous! What use do I have for a religion that asks me how to get to heaven?' And that was the end of the cult of reason.

Looking at the idea that the moral arbiter should be our Christian churches, for those that ascribe to the Christian faith, I think that there has to be enormous persuasive weight on moral issues attributed to our church leaders. I think they are very deserving of that sort of respect at all times. But of course that respect can be taken too far. We do not abandon our own personal intellectual and moral convictions simply because the church to which we belong takes a position on an issue. So I do not think that one has the right to abandon one's intellectual integrity and to simply hide behind a church decision.

Let me return to the stem cell which is not genetically coded, which is at the very heart of this debate. The fact that it is not genetically coded makes it possible to code it in such a way that it can possibly cause the growth of a severed spinal cord, for example, or a pancreas that does not exist. It also has the potential, since it is not coded, to simply run amok and, by definition, become a cancer. This has occurred in the experiments that have taken place. When I considered the vast array of information that was placed before us, I could not find one example where genetic coding of these uncoded cells had successfully taken place. Having taken that initial position, I was led to believe by many of the papers on this matter, which I think all of us have read, that the egg was not fertilised and so had no ability to become a human being. Sir Gustav Nossal's article states:

The egg has not and cannot become a human being.

I do not think that Sir Gustav would deliberately mislead, but I was certainly misled by what he wrote because, as I understood it, the egg was not fertilised. Later on I was advised that it was fertilised. So now we have a little minihuman being in the making that some time in the future will grow into a full human being. That puts an entirely different complexion on what we are talking about here. We are back to Dr Moreau and Dr Frankenstein and *Brave New World* if we are talking about playing around with human beings.

In light of that information, which must certainly be treated with great alarm, I go back to my first intellectual position of: 'No way Jose; we deal with animal stem cells first.' A lobby group came to see me. I think they were very good people. I was very impressed with the sincerity and the moral and intellectual perspective taken in their argument. I said to them, 'I have two difficulties here about cells.' They went through the argument that the cells were non-genetically coded and that maybe they had some ability that a genetically coded cell did not have. That is a very tenuous argument. I would have thought that, if you want spinal cord, you use spinal cord cells; if you want brain cells, as in the case of Parkinson's disease, you work with brain cells, not uncoded stem cells. So I did not think that the power of that argument was very great.

I said the second argument was that throughout human history we have always experimented with animals and, if we were successful in an experiment, we would take that experimentation and apply it to human beings. A lady from the lobby group said, 'We have done that, and done that successfully.' This was a tiny bit naughty of her because I asked her for the research. I said, 'If that had been done, I would have been aware of it,' because there have been a lot of articles written on stem cells. She said that she would provide me with that information, which she did not do. I rang up another proponent of stem cell research—and I thank that scientist very sincerely—and, without hesitation, she sent me the results. I am afraid the results did not indicate that they had successfully restored the use of the hindquarters of a mouse that had a severed spinal cord. In fact, you would argue that it did just the opposite: they had failed to do that.

If we have a case in the future of a mouse that has had stem cells injected into it and it is able to walk again—that is, its anatomy is restored to the degree that it has the use of its limbs once again—I think we would have to look again at this legislation. I personally would have to revisit my decision to oppose this legislation. If we have a situation in which we know that, if we do this, it will remove human pain, misery and suffering, then I believe this thing would have to be revisited and a lot of people like me may well change their position on these issues.

I was one of the two members of parliament that led the anti-abortion debate in the state of Queensland. I have never argued from a moral perspective that this is the moral thing to do, and I have never had to, ironically enough. In the case of abortion, I simply asked the question: is there any member of this state parliament in Queensland who has not had a person come to them in tears wanting to adopt a baby and knowing that there are no babies for adoption? That does not occur very much these days, because everybody knows there are no babies for adoption. But in days past there were reportedly something like 50,000 adoptions a year. There are 120,000 little children banged on the head before they are born.

I have a situation in Charters Towers where we are told that we have lost our park in the centre of town because the young of the bats could die if they were removed from the park. I said: 'That doesn't seem to create a very great problem with the young of human beings, the homo sapiens species. I don't see why it should worry us governmentally if we apply the same decision to the bats in the park.' Constantly we see the enormous efforts to rescue whales and to save trees and all of these things, yet human beings—120,000 of them—are knocked on the head or whatever else is done to them, some of them most unpleasant things, before they are born.

At some future date in history, people will look back on that period of time and say, 'What heinous behaviour, what inhuman behaviour.' In days past, as many people on that side of the debate have said, in the days of slavery, they did not have any difficulty in treating the Negro people like they did because they were slaves, they were something of a lesser order. It seems to me continuously these days that the interests of human beings are denigrated and the interests of trees or animals are put over those of human beings. Where you have a species that can consciously destroy 120,000 of its young every single year, in the bigger scheme of things, evolution takes a very long look at a species that in fact places itself in such jeopardy.

There is a price to be paid for all of these decisions that we collectively take as a society. The price that Australians pay is that we are a vanishing race of people. I cite Mr Bob Birrell of Melbourne University and a very important landmark paper that was published in the *Australian* newspaper where he, as a demographer, points out that in 100 years time the population of Australia will be around six million to seven million people. I doubted that and went to the library here at parliament. You do not have to be Albert Einstein to work it out. Every 20 people that die in Australia are replaced by 17 people. If you do that through five generations, it is not very difficult to do your mathematics and figure out that we will be down around that sort of figure. People say, 'Oh, but there's immigration.' Yes, there is. But they are not Australians. They will be people that will come here subsequently. They are not the Australian race as it now stands.

I had no difficulty in asserting those beliefs and saying that the future for Australia with a dwindling population is a very ugly future indeed. Already now we have enormous difficulties with our contempt for human life, and particularly unborn human life, in proceeding as a race of people because the costs of looking after our old people is such a growing and huge burden. Those of us who went through the debate here on old people's homes heard the Treasurer tell us that we were looking at \$40,000 million a year to look after people in the old people's homes. That will increase with each passing day, and there will be progressively fewer and fewer people to provide the tax or the work force to look after those people.

The other reason that I have strong feelings about it is that we clothe that behaviour in respectability. The alternative is to look after these young women who find themselves in this situation and to encourage them

to have the happiness and joy of having children. I am one of the very few arch conservatives who does not condemn unmarried mothers. I am unable to condemn anyone who has kids, regardless of the circumstances. Ross Cameron, one of the members of parliament here, got a lot of publicity by saying that men today are not prepared to make a commitment to marriage. So, for many girls, if they want to have babies, they really do not have a lot of options. If they go down that pathway, they bring joy and happiness into the world, and I think that is a wonderful thing.

As a race of people, homo sapiens, we are descended from successful mothers. We are genetically programmed to look after our young. For those women who choose to sever the life of their young, I cannot help but believe that some very dark psychological factors will work on them in the short term and in the long term. Study after study indicates that that is the case. You cannot be genetically programmed to look after your species and then go in a complete opposite direction without paying some sort of genetic price for the decision that you have taken.

I earned a lot of notoriety and, in fact, effectively, condemned myself to political oblivion in a disagreement with the then Premier, Mr Ahern, about the sale of condoms, of all things, in Aboriginal communities. There was a line of opinion which I very deeply regret to say was that it would be better if these people were not breeding as much as they were at that time. It gives me very great pain to have to say that in this place. But that was one of many pressures. I am not saying that that pressure came from Mr Ahern; it most certainly did not. I did not have any particular moral hang-ups in the sense that they were available 24 hours a day from the medical aid post. Anyone could just walk up to the medical aid post, which was in every Aboriginal community, and take one or a number of them. But there was a big difference between providing them free from the medical aid post and selling them over the counter and promoting and advertising them in the supermarkets, and that I was not prepared to do. Whilst it looked like I had bent the knee and agreed to do it, of course I resigned before I did it. And the rest is a little piece of Queensland history: Mr Ahern was removed by me and others some two or three months later.

People care and have very strong opinions about these issues, and quite rightly so. Similarly, in the homosexual debate, again I did not take a moralistic position that this was intrinsically wrong or intrinsically evil. My argument centred upon the fact that, statistically speaking, one in four people who participate in that behaviour will contract HIV and condemn themselves to death. So I said: 'If you tell your children that this is acceptable behaviour, statistically speaking, you are saying, "Play Russian roulette," but they would not be playing with a six-chambered revolver but a four-chambered revolver.' That is what you would be saying to your children. I am not prepared to say that to our young people. There are very grave dangers in indulging in this behaviour, and that should be pointed out to our young people, instead of finding that behaviour acceptable. I do not believe that they should be put in jail or anything like that.

The point that I am making is that we should bring a questing and questioning moral weighing-up to these problems and not take a principle laid down, for example, by any Christian church—but we should not ignore the position taken by a Christian church or any other church. With all due respect, their positions should be taken very seriously indeed. If we disagree with the leadership and the moral stand that they are taking, we will want to have very good reasons indeed to do that.

I will conclude by talking about a delightful kids' movie called *Young Einstein*. In the concluding scene, after Einstein had found out about the formula $E=mc^2$, which had great potential for humanity, he said, 'I'm going to give this formula and these principles to the governments of the world, because we can't trust anyone else except the governments of the world to look after this information.' Of course, the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki can tell you about allowing people to go into areas that create very great dangers for homo sapiens as a species on this earth.