

Community Affairs Committee,
Responses to the Lockhart Review,
Department of the Senate
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I would like to preface this submission by pointing out that I am a long retired field geologist - not an academic. I have read the Lockhart Report but have neither the wit nor the time to peruse the technical literature. I therefore refer to various media reports in what follows.

In an article in the Herald Sun of 4/09/06 Craig Sherborne states: "Opposition clusters around the mystical notion that life begins at the moment of conception, a soul has taken root its argued. --- Never mind that the sphere of cells we're talking about is not visible to the naked eye, has no body parts, no consciousness". Similarly, in an article in the Bulletin of 5/09/06, Peter Singer and Agata Sagan include a photograph of a 16-cell human embryo - about three days old - balanced on the tip of a pin and claim it has less rights than a mouse. In a radio program Prof. Loane Skene dismissed the embryo as "a pinprick".

But surely there is nothing mystical about the beginning of human life - it is ineed at conception. As to the reference to the soul, those of us who have such beliefs are reticent about putting them forward in this debate - in particular, I have never seen or heard the much malign Tony Abbott do so.

Each and everyone of us was a pinprick. Why didn't we become a tree, a mouse or whatever? Because the enormous amount of information in that pinprick established us a human being right from conception - this, of course, includes body parts. As for the pin, it is a simple alloy the molecular structure of which holds comparatively scanty data.

It is worth while making a minor digression here in order to put pinpricks into some perspective. In a book review in the September edition of the popular American science magazine "Discovery" Tim Folger points out that "when science writers describe string theory, we usually trot out something like this: the theory defines the fundamental constituents of physical reality --- for sale: if a string were blown up to the size of an atom, an atom would fill the space between Earth and the nearest star." Now our pinprick explodes to galactic proportions. It is also worth considering an article by Ziff and Rosenfield in the Australian Financial Review of 30/06/06. In this, it is stated that "different animal forms are not primarily a function of distinct gene pools that have evolved over millions of years. --- "switches" Carroll emphasises "enable the same genes to be used differently in different animals". In other words, the defining factor is how genes are combined and, in particular, how they are turned on and off. So even though humans and apes may have very similar gene counts the functioning of their genomes could be very different.

I find it odd, very odd, even mystical - to borrow the word from Craig

Sherborne - that scientist can refer the 3 million year old obviously simian skeleton of a young female recently unearthed in Ethiopia as a "human", a "girl" and a "child" and embrace it as an ancestor and yet they are not only willing but fiercely enthusiastic to lethally commodify human embryos - who are very much their contemporaries and without doubt their fellow human beings. Over the last few years they have been doing this with "spare" IVF embryos which were "going to die anyway".

But this has been inadequate for their work and so they want to clone human embryos so that they (the embryos) can be lethally exploited for their stem cells. And so our scientist dissemble by claiming that there is a difference between therapeutic cloning and reproductive cloning. This is outrageously false for the clone destined to be butchered is precisely as human as the clone destined for reproduction.

Adoption of the Lockhart Inquiry proposals would tragically further debase our society which is becoming ever more relaxed about killing as a solution for an increasing number of problems.

In conclusion, I draw your attention to the following extract from an article by Rick Wallace in the Australian on 2/10/06, "Australia will lose billions of dollars in income and lag behind the world scientific community if the ban on therapeutic cloning is not lifted, Victorian Premier Steve Bracks has warned".

Translation:- "Its the economy stupid".

Anthony Michael Cooney