Attitudes towards human reproductive cloning, ART and gene selection

Sir,

I was delighted to see the article of Prainsack et al. (2007) on the comparative attitudes of monozygotic (MZ) twins and dizygotic (DZ) twins on the subject of human reproductive cloning (HRC).

It is true that cloning is not portrayed well in the media, and science fiction has a long history presenting us with strange new worlds where human clones are soulless carbon-copies of ‘real’ human beings. The Prainsack twin study showed that MZ twins were much more likely to approve of the use of HRC for medical purposes such as saving the life of a sibling than were DZ twins. The implication of findings like these is obvious; MZ twins, sharing 100% of each other’s DNA, are aware that, although they are identical genetically, they are people just like anyone else, just as there is no real difference between a person conceived via IVF and a person conceived naturally. However, it is easy to see how a large number of people can go through life without ever being confronted with the reality of the situation that MZ twins find themselves in.

Another objection to HRC is the idea that mere mortals should not play god. Indeed, Prainsack et al. found that increasing religiosity correlated with a more negative view of HRC. However, religion has been a major barrier to many if not most scientific innovations in the past, from Galileo and his theories on astronomy, to the Hadron Collider, so perhaps the current state of affairs will resolve itself with the passage of time.

Somatic cell nuclear transfer uses the cells which our body normally discards or reabsorbs (Wilmut et al., 2002); if using these cells to make a new life is wrong, what does that mean for every sloughed off skin cell, every ovum lost during menstruation, every sperm that is thwarted by contraception?

References


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