

Evening News

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It's life but not as we know it . .

DAVID MOYES

RECENT evidence gathered from the experiences of donor-conceived children has shown that a biological parental link is crucial to a child's sense of identity. Many such children, now adults, have found the lack of knowledge regarding their biological inheritance difficult to accept.

It is therefore troubling that UK scientists are arguing for the creation of animal-human hybrid embryos, which would see human parents sharing their "parenthood" with a cow or a rabbit.

In a sense, this procedure constitutes an in vitro version of bestiality (animal-human sexual activity), which is outlawed in the UK. The formation of an animal-human hybrid, while devoid of the sexual element, takes place between an animal and a human in a lab. The person gives something of his or her "human self" while the animal gives its "animal self".

In the creation of new human life, part of one person meets and mingles with part of another, forming something completely new. This is one of the most beautiful and meaningful aspects of having children, and is very important to parents.

Indeed, where this is not the case, the fact that the child would not be biologically related to both partners is often very difficult for prospective parents. The biological link is not trivial.

Should we, therefore, be worried that a cow can have the same link to an embryo as a human?

There is more to human life than finding cures and "progressing" medical science. The foundations of our humanity are surely important and worth preserving too. By deciding that all children conceived with donor sperm or eggs should have the right to know their biological parentage, the Government has recognised that certain bonds are too fundamental to mess about with.

But perhaps we are worrying too much. Scientists are not proposing to implant hybrid embryos, let alone bring them to term. And they acknowledge the need for regulation in this area.

Having said this, there is a certain contradiction in their approach. They affirm the need for regulation in order to gain public support, but resist ethical boundaries arguing that legislation needs to reflect changing views. In other words, they rely on the claim that regulations safeguard against the further pushing-back of boundaries, as well as the claim that boundaries must be moveable.

So should we really believe that these safeguards stand in the way of animal-human

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embryos eventually being implanted into the womb? There is an argument that says these safeguards might crumble when such a procedure becomes valuable in the pursuit of a treatment of a terminal disease. And what will happen when scientists want to study embryos at increasingly later stages of development?

Do we want to end up in a world where the value of creating life is diminished and where science is pushing ever further into disturbing territory?

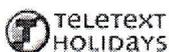
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