



Will Therapeutic Cloning Fail or Foster Future Aging Research?

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April 22, 2003

KONDRACKE: This is a momentous month; it's the fifty-year anniversary of the announcement of the discovery of DNA, and it's the month when the completion of the Human Genome Project has been announced.

In the last two debates we have discussed questions such as: How long are we capable of extending human life? or can we make humans immortal or nearly so? Should we make super humans? Are we moving into a post-human future, etc.?

Today's issue presents a more immediate issue, but one no less profound. It's the issue of cloning human embryos for research. Our two guests are Charles Krauthammer, a critic of that research, and Dr. Michael West, whose company has actually done it. Dr. West was the founder and vice president of Geron Corporation in Menlo Park, California, and organized the scientific effort to extract stem cells from human embryos in the first instance. He is now the president, chairman, and CEO of Advance Cell Technologies of Worcester, Massachusetts, and in November 2001, he co-published the first report his company did on the cloning of a human embryo.

Charles Krauthammer is a doctor, a graduate of Harvard Medical School turned journalist, a columnist for the *Washington Post*, and a Pulitzer Prize winner. He is also a contributor to the *Weekly Standard* and the *New Republic* and a contributor to Fox News. In 2001, he was appointed to the President's Council on Bioethics.

The way we're going to do this is that we will start with Charles Krauthammer and he will do a five-minute presentation of the case against therapeutic cloning or research cloning. Then Michael West will respond or have his five-minute say. Then we'll have a question and answer session, in which I will throw questions, if it's necessary, or the two of them can interact for twenty minutes or so. Then, depending on how many questions we have from the Web audience and from our studio audience here, we'll take questions.

So, with that, let me have Charles Krauthammer start.

KRAUTHAMMER: Thank you Mort. It's a pleasure to be here. This is a very important forum and I really admire you for the work you've been doing in helping to sharpen the debate and to raise awareness about these very sophisticated, very difficult, and very critical moral dilemmas that we face in bioethics. I must say that I have to preface what I say by saying that, though I am a member of the President's Council on Bioethics, I speak only in my own capacity and not on behalf of the council.

I don't make the case against research cloning with any great relish. I understand that there is great promise with this research, although I do have some reservations about the amount of hype that has surrounded it and some of the promises being made particularly to people who are elderly and suffering about the miracle cures around the corner. I don't believe that's realistic and I believe that, in some ways, it's a cruel and false hope.

Nonetheless, I understand the power and promise of this research, and it's with a heavy heart that I believe it ought to be stopped.

Let me begin, since we're going to try to do this in only a few minutes, by raising the obvious objection, which I think is one that probably influenced many members of Congress. There's a national consensus—almost a universal consensus—against human reproductive cloning. There's no dispute about that; the debate is about research cloning. Nonetheless, the research of cloning does open the door to reproductive cloning in an obvious way. Banning the production of cloned infants or babies while permitting the production of cloned embryos, I think, creates a real conundrum because if you have factories all over the country producing embryos for research or for commerce it is inevitable that someone, somewhere will implant one in a woman or perhaps, in the further future, in some artificial medium and produce a human clone, in which case, what do you do?

A law that bans reproductive cloning but permits research cloning would then make it a crime not to destroy the embryo, which is an obvious moral absurdity.

I think that is the obvious objection, and I think that it does sway many legislators, but I think it gets us off the hook philosophically. Assume that weren't an issue; I still believe that we ought to be extremely reluctant to make this legal. And the reasons, I think, are rather complicated.

There's one school, which I do not represent but which I respect, associated with the Roman Catholic Church and with others who have religious objections based on the idea of human life beginning at conception. I don't share that view, but I respect it. And I understand how, when people who have that belief, believe that research cloning which necessarily involves the creation of the clone embryo and its destruction, would be the destruction of human life. It's a serious objection, but the problem is that intellectually it's not very fruitful or productive.

Either you believe that or you don't. And if you don't believe, as I do, that human life or, at least "personhood," begins at conception, you have a more difficult problem trying to reason as to what the dangers and the reasons are that one might be extremely hesitant about legalizing this procedure. I'll take a minute to outline the three kinds of objections.

The first is what I would call the *Brave New World* objections. And that is, that by harnessing the developing human embryo, we are taking control of a mechanism of unimaginable complexity—one that, on our own, we could never have created and are going to manage. We're going to influence it; we're going to create stem cells or perhaps even organs that might be useful in therapy. Once you begin harnessing that embryo, which is this organism of incredible complexity, there are all kinds of monstrosities that become possible that are the kinds of things that all of us, I think, would object to.

We've had research with headless tadpoles and headless mice. One could imagine a situation in which one would want to create a sort of subhuman organism that could be

harvested long before its birth for parts. This kind of power that we would give ourselves, I think, is very scary; it's a reason to be fairly hesitant. It is not a reason, I would say, to ban this procedure because, just as in regular stem cell research from discarded human embryos, I believe that, with regulation, we could control that and make it permissible. So it's a problem but I don't think it's a reason to ban.

The second problem I would call the "slippery slope." Once you begin to allow the production of the cloned embryo to say, the blastula stage, it will be inevitable that there will be a scientist or a researcher who will say, "If you could only allow me to develop it a little bit further, I could produce even more miraculous results."

Obviously, this would require implantation, either in a woman or an animal or, perhaps in the future, in some artificial medium. Nonetheless, instead of today, the idea of research cloning is you create a blastocyst, you tease out the stem cells, you grow them in a medium. You then tweak them so you can differentiate them into any particular kind of organ lines. You then re-implant them in the original host. That's a very Rube Goldberg way to go about stuff.

All you'll have to do is allow that embryo to grow another week or two or three, or month or two or three, and you can have a full kidney, a full lung, whatever you need for implantation. It will be a temptation extremely hard to resist. And I think that slippery slope will be out there. Today, we can say we're going to stop at a blastocyst; tomorrow who's going to be there to stop us?

This is also a serious objection. And again, I would say it's analogous to our debate on stem cells in that we've now decided that we can do that, allow the development of the blastocyst to the seventh, eighth stage, tease it out, use it and rely on regulation and the force of law and custom and the manners to actually enforce it. Again, I would say, this too is a serious objection, but perhaps one we are able to regulate and control.

So why, in the end, would I object to research cloning? Because I think it goes one step beyond normal stem cell research. It's not just the *Brave New World* factor, it's not just the slippery slope; it is that, in cloning, you do something today that you do not do in stem cell research. We are creating an embryo for the sole purpose of its destruction and use. Unlike stem cell research, in which the embryos are used, are taken from fertility clinics and are destroyed and are discarded and would be doomed anyway, here we are taking a cloned embryo, creating it entirely as a means. And I think that is breaking a moral frontier. I think once we begin to do something of that sort, which is to make the embryo entirely instrumental, entirely a means to another end, I think we have broken a barrier which is extremely important that we retain. It is to reduce the embryo to utter "thingness." I think once you do that, all the other restrictions I talked about earlier on—stem cell research and other embryonic research—are in jeopardy.

Therefore, I argue, that that would be a powerful reason to restrain ourselves, despite the benefits which might be possible, to cross a frontier which might prove to be calamitous to our moral and ethical health.

KONDRACKE: Thank you, Charles. Dr. Michael West.

WEST: Well, thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

I'm in favor of embryonic stem cell technology and the use of cloning, if the use cloning is to clone cells and not people.

First I wanted to lay some groundwork. It's interesting that we're talking here today in a meeting sponsored in large part by the Alliance for Aging Research because these technologies, embryonic stem cells and cloning, were at least in part—a large part in fact—developed to put new tools in the toolbox of the geriatrician.

And why do I say that? Medicine today, scientific research in medicine today, is in itself a crossroads—maybe coinciding with a shift into a new century, a new millennium. In the past, medical research has focused largely on the diseases of young people. Every medical school in the United States has their department of pediatrics and obstetrics. Very few—maybe less than a handful—have a department of geriatric medicine. This is the new frontier of medicine.

Increasingly, we've solved the problems of the diseases of young people and we're seeing a rectangularization of the survivorship curve. Today, for instance, if we put all of our national resources on eliminating all death before the age of 50, the impact on life expectancy would be about three and a half years. The reason is, increasingly so, and certainly true today, that the majority of diseases we see now are age-related diseases: Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and so on. But that has not historically been our focus.

So gerontologists such as myself have gone back to the blackboard and said, "Let's invent a whole new type of technology and call it 'regenerative medicine.' Let's go back to very primitive embryonic cells and try to find within them brand new technologies that could be used to solve these problems we've never before faced."

Now in doing so, of course, we've entered a territory of immense controversy. I think we have decades, maybe centuries, of hard ethical thinking and debate ahead of us. But I would argue that one starting point here in these first few years of this new century, one important ground rule, is that it should be a dispassionate and reasoned debate. References to "headless clones," and all due respect, *Brave New World* rhetoric are inflammatory and meant to scare people. It is not in the human best interest. If you cannot defend an argument based on intellect and reason alone, I would argue that it's not a good argument and shouldn't be used.

There certainly is power in this new technology we're developing; it could be abused. But this first argument, that this is a brave new world and we ought to be scared of it, I think is flat wrong. I think we ought to face our future with courage and a desire to help our fellow human being. And we should learn from history—history is replete with objections to the use of anesthesia in childbirth because it's against the book of Genesis.

We should be against blood transfusions because the life is in the blood according to the book of Leviticus in the Bible. I think we should learn from history that we should face the future with courage and our guiding light should be compassion for our fellow human being and using our imagination and creativity to that end.

The second argument of “slippery slope”—that we cannot practically implement these new technologies because they will inevitably, unavoidably slide into an ethical morass—I find to be a bit ironic because we are within shouting distance of the U.S. Congress.

I would argue, not being a political scientist nonetheless—I think history would teach us that it is possible to put in place laws with heavy penalties that would prohibit any person in the country from crossing a particular line. In the case of the medical use of cloning, making cells not people, all you have to do is say that embryonic cells cannot develop past fourteen days. That’s a limit based on biology; that is the point at which human development begins. I would argue that it would actually be relatively easy to implement such legislation, and it certainly deserves a try. And then see whether or not those penalties were sufficient to prevent an inappropriate use of this technology.

One last criticism that we heard is commodification. Aren’t we headed into a world where biotechnology and businesses commodify life itself? I would argue, again taking from history, that we’ve heard this argument before. In the 1970s, when science wanted to help women have children through in vitro fertilization, making an embryo in a test tube, the commentaries and newspapers were replete with pictures of test tubes lined up in a laboratory with little babies in them. And the idea was that we’ll have an assembly line; we’re going to commodify life; it’s going to be a manufacturing process. It’s the same with blood banking; what could be more commercial than a bank? Some religious groups, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, thought life was in the blood. We shouldn’t be making a bank out of a fish, the human soul.

All I can say is, in retrospect, the lessons we’ve learned through history show that if the goal of medicine is to alleviate human suffering and the commodification or the industrialization or the making a business out of this is a means to allow such therapies to be available to the broadest possible audience at the lowest possible cost, then history teaches us that it’s a good use of technology.

KONDRACKE: Thank you very much. Charles, let me just ask you—

KRAUTHAMMER: Can I respond?

KONDRACKE: Yes, I do want you to—why don’t you respond and then I’ll ask questions.

KRAUTHAMMER: First of all, if we’re going to talk about scare tactics and sophisticated, rational debate, I would think it rather odd that you would refer to Leviticus and Genesis when I said specifically that my argument was not based either on religious or other grounds. There are people who do object on grounds of religion and I

respect it, but that was not my argument at all. It is classic in this debate—and I've watched it over the last few years—that people who want to promote this brave new world of technology always like to cast the opposition as religious obscurantists. A good example is going all the way back to the example of Galileo; we're not talking about the church imposing views of people who are referring—or Jehovah's Witnesses objecting to the blood banking. It is not an argument to say that because people objected to a unreasonable advances of science in the past, therefore, the advance I'm offering today ought to be allowed. It's not an argument. You have to justify what you're doing in terms of the risks.

The two objections I raised, which I believe in—the ones that I emphasized at the beginning and the end, you have not answered. The first is you say that you can regulate fourteen days by law. Well, how are we going to regulate if we have an industry here and around the entire country of people producing embryos—cloned embryos—for research? How will you prevent a single one of those from being planted in a woman or even in other media in the future? The answer is, there's no way to prevent that. If that happens, what do you do with that cloned embryo? You're going to have the moral absurdity that says that it's going to have to be destroyed.

And the last point I brought up, which is the one I tried to emphasize, is that when you go to cloning you break new ground. It's not like stem cell research. We are using the discarded embryos—processed embryos that would otherwise die. We are saying that we are going to do something new; we're going to create embryos entirely for their destruction. You have argued that the opponents have tried to scare people by talking about slippery slopes, and you can enforce them. Let me give you an example of a slippery slope:

Two years ago we had an argument on stem cell research on the Hill. We were assured by the proponents of that bill that this meant the use of stem cells from embryos discarded from the clinics. It was emphasized by those who supported this research, including Senator Hatch and others, that they would not countenance and indeed would not allow the creation of embryos—not a clone—just regular embryos, purely for the purpose of creating embryos to be discarded and be used as stem cells. So here we are in one year arguing that we will allow discarded embryos but not the creation of embryos entirely for their destruction. A year later we have a debate on cloning and the same senators who had assured us the year before that they would explicitly outlaw the creation of embryos purely for their destruction and research are not supporting a technique—cloning of embryos—which requires the creation of embryos in order to destroy them. That is a slippery slope. It's not hypothetical. It occurred in Washington, in public, within the last two years.

KONDRACKE: Michael, do you want to respond?

WEST: I would love to.

KONDRACKE: OK.

WEST: Well, with regard to the slippery slope, the fact is that there are members of the U.S. Congress that are not scientists that are trying their hardest to understand a new technology, grapple with it, try to understand it. They then first look at the issues of the first embryonic stem cells, how they're going to be used and then, later, grapple with the issue of nuclear transfer and realize, "Geez, you know, I did begin by saying that we would never create an embryo for the use of stem cells." Then they recognize that, "Gosh, we need to take advantage of the fact that nuclear transfer offers a way of making itself that wouldn't be rejected." I don't consider that a slippery slope. I saw it happen. I saw Senator Hatch for instance, initially take that position and then I was happy to have the opportunity to sit down with him. He asked a lot of questions, and I saw in his own mind that evolution—which I didn't think was a slippery slope at all. What I observed was a collection of data, careful thought about where this technology would be taking us. Indeed, weeks and months of, as he described, "prayerful consideration." I saw what was not a slippery slope, but the use of reason and compassion about how technology could be used in medicine.

KRAUTHAMMER: Forgive me; that's not an answer. You're giving a re-definition of what occurred. You call it an "evolution"; I call it a "slippery slope." The fact is that whatever avenue he went through, whatever meetings he went through, whatever data he looked at, he made a revised moral judgment. It's not a question of fact. The judgment he made originally was, "We're at a frontier of ethical action that is very dangerous because of its inherent power." Therefore, he originally said, "Yes, we will allow discarded embryos, but we will not allow the creation of human life solely as a means to an end that violates a Kantian ideal of a categorical imperative." That was his view. Then, a year later, after consultation with you as I now understand—now I know how it happened—he says, "Oh no, the moral frontier now is breakable; I have a new frontier."

I'm not trying to say he's a bad man because he changed his view, all I'm saying is it will be tempting today and tomorrow and forever to move the moral frontier when people like you approach and say, "I can offer you some miracles." That's the danger. That's why I think we have to draw a line and stay with it; otherwise there is no frontier, no bottom and no barrier.

KONDRACKE: Michael, in one of Charles' articles, he referred to your own company developing, in fact, a fetus farm with cows. In other words, developing a cow embryo to the point where organs could be harvested. And now Charles' fear is that someday that will happen with humans. What's to prevent that if—in view of the fact that, "My child is dying..." why should that child not have a heart or a set of lungs, or something like that which we could get from this half-developed fetus? Why could that not occur ten, twenty, thirty years from now?

WEST: Well, science and technology are littered with similar examples. All power of knowledge over nature could be used for evil, and it could be used for good. And this argument that someone, certainly, will pick up this technology and use it for evil would stop all this...

KONDRACKE: By the time we ever got to it, it would be the argument that it was for good and it *would* be for good. It would have good purposes.

WEST: But Charles' criticism, which I read, and was saddened to read, was again, I would argue, not an attack based on reason but, in this case, not an argument, but an attack on our character. And what he said was, we report in the scientific journal that we had done certain experiments in animals, in this case the cow, and we cloned not just this little ball of cells, which we're calling an embryo, this microscopic ball of cells, but we actually cloned a cow fetus, a fetus with a beating heart. We took that fetus out, took tissues from it, and used it in a study of whether cloned tissues are rejecting them. And his argument was, "Look, they're already doing this in animals, so no matter what he says in public..."—what I say in public—"...that we should not go there with humans." It's, "You can see what they're doing with the animals and can you believe him? Is he telling you the truth?" That's a personal attack against us. I think I'm—

KONDRACKE: Frankly, I didn't read it as a personal attack. It struck me as—

KRAUTHAMMER: Where did you read that?

WEST: That was the *Time* magazine piece.

KRAUTHAMMER: And what did I say?

WEST: "Can you believe them? They say they will not go there. Can you..."

KRAUTHAMMER: I was not talking about you at all. That's not true. I have here the article I wrote and I could have Mort read it. All I said was—

KONDRACKE: Frankly, I've read practically everything Charles has said, and what he's talking about is slippery slope and he's not attacking—

WEST: It doesn't matter what this person—

KRAUTHAMMER: Well, it does because you just accused me of making ad hominem arguments, and I don't and I didn't. All I said was you had demonstrated how, in a cow, you can proceed beyond the blastocyst and produce a well-formed organ—I believe it was a kidney—whose re-implantation in the original cow had some real function. I said, "There's an astonishing development and it shows you that we will be tempted in the future to say, 'Why do the Rube Goldberg pulling out a stem cell out of blastocyst when you can just proceed for a week or two or three or a month or two or three and produce a formed organ which is far more useful and easy to use?'" I'm saying that if the technology is going to be here, there'll be a temptation to use it.

And I don't know where you got this idea of ad hominem argument, but I object to it and I think it's a false accusation.

WEST: Well let's put that aside.

KRAUTHAMMER: Well, it's hard to put it aside.

KONDRACKE: Well, put it aside.

KRAUTHAMMER: All right. In deference to our chairman, I'll—

(Laughter)

WEST: But the point is this: we knew that in doing that study—and we debated this—we knew that there would be opponents who would pick up on that and say we intended to do this on humans. We don't. I'm in favor of a long—

KRAUTHAMMER: I never said that.

WEST: I wasn't speaking about you. The point is that such an experiment is ethical to do in animals. It lays the groundwork for what we call “research cloning” or “therapeutic cloning” and what we're advocating is a red herring. What we're advocating is that we clone an embryo, a microscopic ball of unformed cells that has not begun to develop yet. We propose that we set a fourteen-day limit because that's when development begins; it should be made law. We should ban the use of cloning to make people. We should open the door, as the National Academy of Sciences and many other groups have, to use this technology to make cells and, if proper force of law is placed on it, I think that we could prevent it from being abused.

And, Charles, you think the fourteen-day limit, which works in Britain—there is a law that allows a blastocyst to be developed no longer than fourteen days and, so far as I know, it has not been broken—might not hold.

KRAUTHAMMER: I'm willing to believe that it can be, which is why I support stem cell research. In that respect, as I tried to indicate in my presentation, stem cell research and cloning are identical in that respect. I'm skeptical, but because of the possible benefit, I would be willing to support stem cells from discarded embryos and have a limited number of fourteen days and hopefully it'll hold. That would be a hard, red line.

The reason why I, in the end, would come out against cloning is because of its uniqueness. It breaks a different moral barrier and that is the creation of a human embryo for the exclusive purposes of its use and destruction as a means to an end. That I think is a different category of ethical breach, and I think that opens us up to the dehumanization of the entire process.

So my objection is not to the fourteen days. I support stem cell research; I think that we can—that we ought to at least test, but in cloning it's all or nothing; you're making something exclusively for its destruction.

WEST: This gets into your philosophical position. On the one hand you say that a human embryo is not in and of itself inviolable.

KRAUTHAMMER: Right.

WEST: But at the end of the day, you say that to create a human embryo for the sake of destruction is to breach a moral barrier. And it seems to me that you're contradicting yourself; that you really do believe deep down somewhere that a human embryo is inviolable.

KRAUTHAMMER: No. I believe that between inviolability on the one hand and "thingness" on the other, which means no respect due it, there's a territory and that's where I live, in that territory. I don't believe that an embryo is just like an appendage, all right? But I don't believe it deserves the kind of respect that a person does. I wouldn't give it a funeral, for example. I wouldn't invest it in property rights, for example. But I don't believe it's a skin cell. Once it develops it deserves a certain kind of respect. Not the respect due a full human, but not nothing. That's where I think the distinction between my and Dr. West's opinions is.

KONDRACKE: So it's the creation of the embryo for the sake of destruction that you can't abide, even if the end is the cure of people's suffering.

KRAUTHAMMER: I believe that it is an important enough moral barrier. The complete instrumentalization of a human embryo—that, I think, it is a bridge that we ought not cross.

KONDRACKE: Now, can you deny, Dr. West, that there are going to be factors, that there are going to be thousands and thousands of these embryos produced and they are going to be destroyed—and they are nascent human life? I mean, how do you breach that moral barrier that Charles is talking about?

WEST: Well, I think we see the world differently because the way we're viewing this microscopic ball of cells that we're calling an embryo—I think it's important to point out, and unfortunately the science doesn't play as important of a role in this discussion as it should, and we don't have time for a science thrust in embryology, but the origins of human life are a surprise. Remember when you first learned about how we came to be, about how sexual reproduction occurs? I was surprised. I didn't think it should work that way. In the same way, when a sperm and an egg cell unite, we have a little ball of cells that's not yet a pregnancy. But half of the time those never attach, never make a pregnancy.

What's important to point out, though, is that these cells do not begin to develop into anything until about fourteen days after the fertilization of the egg. Prior to that, what scientists say is that the embryo has not individualized; up to fourteen days, this little clump of cells could split into two and make identical twins. Indeed, that does occur up to two weeks after fertilization.

So because these cells are unformed and haven't made the first decision, which is, are we going to become one person or two?—certainly have not begun to develop—scientists say that these are blank cells, they haven't individualized. Then, from that base, I would argue that if they haven't individualized, how can we be talking about, on a rational basis, ascribing to unformed blank cells the status of a person if they're not an individual?

And so, with biology as my background, I'm saying that if we make blank cells that have not begun to develop, haven't formed a person, they're just blank cells. If we make that a bright line and say, "We will not cross it under any conditions," we're looking to entirely comprise the use of technology—far less than using tissues to help people that are sick, from cadavers, people in comas, people in motorcycle accidents—far more problematic than using blank, unformed cells.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

KONDRACKE: ...as we can from cloned embryos. What's the answer to that?

WEST: You're asking me? Briefly, the cells in the human body branch out like branches of a tree. So there are some cells that begin with a fertilized egg, the trunk of the tree and the pre-plantation embryos. And then they branch out, once development begins, into all the neurons and muscle and bones and all the cells in the body.

There are cells in you and me as adults that have the ability to branch out at least with a few of the stems or branches; they're called "adult" stem cells. As far as we know today, there are no cells that are the base in the tree of cellular life. In the adult they can branch out into all of the cells of the body, as the embryonic stem cell can. So, as a researcher on embryonic stem cells, of course, I have to point out that these cells are totally potent. By definition, they can become anything in the human body, making cells for diabetes and Parkinson's and many other diseases.

But I do not point the finger at the adult stem cell researchers and diminish their work. I think it's important work, and I think it should be done in parallel. I think we should let all flowers bloom.

KONDRACKE: We have only five minutes left. Let's go to the audience for questions. If necessary, I'll repeat the questions from the Web. Any questions from the audience? Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Charles has mentioned the embryo not being human, but not nothing. Could you make comparisons to the way slaves were dealt with—legally being something like three-fifths of a person at one time in our history? Or if you go to the eugenics movement, particularly in experiments done by the Nazi regime, Jews, Gypsies, blacks, many types of people were considered something less than human or something inferior. I mean would you consider your definition of embryo comparable?

KONDRACKE: Did you pick that up?

KRAUTHAMMER: You raise an interesting point: The trajectory of our history for the last centuries has been to expand the boundaries of what we call the human family, and to welcome into citizenship members of the family that had been excluded to one extent or another. Slavery is a classic example. The suppression of women is another, and I think all of us have welcomed that. Yet what we have from the bioengineering community is an attempt to move into the other direction. To try to treat certain—let us not say “persons,” but “human organisms”—as less than human, or blank or non-human completely.

I think it’s dangerous because there will always be the temptation to expand the non-human—what we can use—further, further, further as a way to bring cures and relieve suffering. People will say, “Well, that they’re now up to fourteen days, why not twenty-one days and why not go beyond that?” So it is the movement against the trajectory of, if you like, the social compassion of the last two centuries to restrict what we call human or deserving of human respect of some sort. That’s what I’m worried about.

KONDRACKE: Michael, do you want to respond to that?

WEST: Well, it’s a complex question, and it’s hard to answer in just a few minutes. Basically what I would argue is that, again, inflammatory rhetoric, references to Nazis, etc., should be forbidden. What we need to look at here is the moral status of the pre-implantation embryos in one hand—cells that have not yet begun to develop; that’s a biological fact. On the other hand is the life of a person that we know or don’t know, a person with diabetes, Parkinson’s, a person who is a living, breathing human being. On the left hand a potential human being. Then again, a skin cell is potential. On the other hand, the life of an actual human being. I think that’s the moral dilemma that we’re in today.

KONDRACKE: Does either of you see any possibility of a middle ground here or is this an absolute barrier, the idea of research cloning?

KRAUTHAMMER: My personal view—and I speak for a small minority because the majority of those who oppose it do it on religious grounds and are rather absolutist on this, but I speak on behalf of the smaller secular constituency that opposes it on other grounds. I do think that there is something radically different about research cloning because it involves the creation for the sole purpose of destruction. When we met this problem on the President’s Council on Bioethics we reached a compromise of sorts, which was to propose a moratorium instead of a ban.

Now, I’m sure that Dr. West doesn’t think that’s a great compromise. What it did do is allow us to look at the issue, study it to see if there might be other alternatives. As you mentioned, adult stem cells, which, even though they are not totally potent, if they are plastic enough—usable enough to treat specific illnesses—will obviate any need for cloning of embryonic cells. Because if you’re going to take an adult cell out of your own marrow, the rejection problem is not there, and if it could develop into a pancreatic cell and relieve diabetes, then you’ve got a cure and you don’t have to go this route.

So I would say a moratorium was a way in which our council found a crude compromise, and perhaps with time we'll be able to find other means of achieving the same ends that do not violate the ethical lines that I've talked about.

KONDRACKE: That gets us back to the issue of adult stem cells as the answer, but do you have any—

WEST: I don't think this is an area of our current political climate where the compromise is what we should be looking at. I think what we should be looking at is disease. We're talking about disease and therapies to alleviate human suffering. This is serious business; it isn't just, "OK, let's compromise and we'll put a moratorium in place and let thousands of people die everyday that could have potentially been cured someday because we don't know what to do."

I think we need to decide. The United States is the leading technology country in the world, and I know for a fact that the world is looking to the United States for leadership. So I would argue that we should look at this courageously. If it's wrong, then we should determine that it's wrong. If it's a good and compassionate use of technology, as many of the scientists in the United States are saying—such as the National Academy of Sciences formally recommending this—I think we need to look at this carefully and soberly and rapidly make an important decision that the rest of the world will be looking at.

KONDRACKE: Let me follow that up with a question about what's happening in the rest of the world. As of right now, what you're doing is perfectly legal as there is no national law against cloning embryos. It's up for debate in the Senate. No one knows if a moratorium will pass or if nothing will pass; and probably nothing will pass. But what's happening? Is there a lot going on in the rest of the world so that the United States might be behind in this?

WEST: I think, clearly, the United States is taking the lead in stem cell research, with the possible exception of the United Kingdom. In the United Kingdom, maybe *the* embryo research country in the world, they've already set a precedent by debating this carefully and putting in place guidelines and licensing so that the medical use of nuclear transfer cloning can be used with the proper guidelines and the use to clone people could be banned.

But the United States is right in there with the U.K., and I think we and the United Kingdom will lead the world into these new technologies.

KONDRACKE: OK, we're at the end here. Each of you has two minutes to sum up. Charles, you begin, and Michael West will have the last word since you had the first word.

KRAUTHAMMER: Dr. West has talked about the suffering of people who are dying today and I'm very sympathetic to that. He concludes from that that we have to come to a rapid conclusion. We should begin to launch this industry, which will create factories

creating human embryos throughout this country in large numbers for the purpose of their destruction? I think that is a larger moral leap. I think that if his concern is with human suffering, which I share, then I don't understand why there is this desire to pour our resources into a very ethically difficult, and, I think, suspect area, when we could be pouring it into, as you indicated, a far more promising area of adult stem cells—because, as I indicated, the entire process of developing a cloned embryo into something usable is very difficult, extremely problematic, and years away. Those people Dr. West is concerned about will be dead by the time that could actually occur whereas, the adult stem cells, which we know will not be rejected, have a lot of promise and would allow us to avoid these ethical conundrums, and, I think, ethical difficulties.

My conclusion is that it is not as the proponents want us to think: obscurantist religious people on the one hand versus progress and relieving human suffering on the other. All of us are interested in relieving human suffering. The question is, do we do it at the cost of our souls?

KONDRACKE: Michael West?

WEST: Well, the use of the word soul, I think, gives me license to also refer to a biblical concept. There's a parable in the Bible, the "Talents of Gold." Two servants are given some talents of gold and have to make a profit. One servant goes out and doubles the money and gives it to his master. Another servant is given some talents of gold and, out of fear because the master is harsh, buries them in the ground and gives his master back the original talents of gold when he asks for them. In the Bible it refers to that second servant as "slothful and wicked."

Now we have to look into the future, I think, taking to mind, in part, the lessons of the past. The collective human wisdom is that fear of the future and superstitions are not good guiding lights. I would argue that knowledge and science should be our guiding light, as should compassion for our fellow human being. We ought to be willing to take the risk of making mistakes with the assumption that we're making the best efforts we can. Now, I'm not talking about a rapid decision, but a decision made thoughtfully and as rapidly as possible. I would argue that we're wicked and slothful, especially being the leading technology country in the world, if we do not think this through carefully, dispassionately, and with the benefit of our fellow human being very carefully in mind.

KONDRACKE: Michael West, Charles Krauthammer, thank you so much for doing this. This has been a challenging and exciting debate. I urge people to log onto [sagecrossroads.net](http://www.sagecrossroads.net) for continuing articles, book reviews and online discussions. Thank you very much for being with us.

End.