

Debate focuses on human clones

By **TIFFANY INBODY**
Editor in chief

PHILADELPHIA—The scientist who cloned the world-famous sheep, Dolly, said the debate on cloning is leaving a person out, the cloned child.

Dr. Ian Wilmut, researcher for the Rosenthal Institute in Scotland, and other cloning experts addressed the rights and wrongs of human cloning at the American Association for the Advancement of Science annual meeting on Friday.

Wilmut said there are ethical issues to be considered in any use of cloning technology.

Cloning can be used appropriately in some instances, but cloning an adult person is not one of them, Wilmut said.

"I think the relationship between the child and the parents would be bound to be different, disturbed," he said. "I think we should treat each child as an individual."

Dr. Arthur Caplan, director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania Health System, said some of the people who can afford to use the cloning technology are arguing for their rights to reproduce in any way possible.

"Reproductive technology in the United States at this point in time is kind of a Wild West," he said.

If a person has enough money, someone out there can find a way to clone a human, Caplan said.

Dr. Glenn McGee, the associate director for education for the Center for Bioethics at the University of Pennsylvania Health System, said having a cloned child would change the nature of a family.

Cloning raises many of the same issues as adop-

tion, he said.

There needs to be a system in place to assist families who want cloned children. Lori Andrews, professor of reproductive law and genetic law at the Kent School of Law in Chicago, said the issue of who the legal parents are becomes confusing.

If Bill Gates wanted to clone himself, genetically, he would be creating an identical brother, she said.

Under laws in some states, the legal guardian could be 10 different people, Andrews said.

Andrews addressed ethical questions when considering the cloning of an adult, particularly a famous one.

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Lori Andrews
Professor of Reproductive Law and Genetic Law

"If Michael Jordan was cloned and the 10-year-old clone broke his knee, would we consider him worthless?"

The cloned child would be under pressure to be a basketball star and not pursue other avenues of life, she said.

McGee said, "Cloning could intensify parents' desire to stylize their children, to make them in the image of a father."

Caplan presented a scenario of the relationship between a guardian and a clone. He referred to one possibility as the "Woody Allen Syndrome," referring to the film personality who married his step-daughter.

"It is somewhat odd to think that people might have feelings that are consistent with love or even sexual feelings toward someone that they parent," he said. "Something like that is going to be true of clones."

Caplan used the example of cloning his wife. "I am in love with my wife. What does that do to the relationship to the clone?"

NASA prepares for Martian microbes

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Rock samples that NASA plans to scoop up from Mars could contain live bacteria or viruses, and scientists are making elaborate plans to protect Earth from possible microbial Martians.

Several federal agencies are working together to design and build a high tech laboratory that will protect against a living Mars germ.

Such a germ might pose a risk of disease or infection for the Earth's people, plants or animals when the Martian samples are returned in about 10 years.

"Samples from Mars should be considered hazardous until proven otherwise," Jonathan Y. Richmond, a biological containment expert for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Sunday at the national meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

"The risk is very small, but not zero," said John D. Rummel, NASA's planet protection officer.

"We're ignorant (about Mars) and what we've learned in biology is that when you are ignorant, be careful."

Although the site and many details are still unknown, NASA plans to build a laboratory that would quarantine the Mars samples behind the same biocontainment barriers that scientists now use to prevent the escape of Ebola, a highly contagious and lethal African virus.

Samples collected by robot craft

on Mars would be sealed on the Martian surface and not opened until the containers are placed in vaults under negative pressure, which permits air to flow in, but not out.

Richmond said that bits of the Mars samples would be placed in agar, a laboratory nutrient, to see if anything grows. Specimens would be exposed to tissue cultures to test for toxicity and for the presence of any microorganism.

Eventually, some of the material could even be injected into animals to see if it does harm, he said.

NASA has done all of this before. The agency built a complex laboratory to protect the Earth from any moon bugs when samples were returned during the Apollo lunar program. No evidence of life was ever found.

But Rummel said "life is quite a bit more likely on Mars than on the moon."

Mars was a warm, wet place, perhaps with oceans, some 3.5 billion years ago, at a time when it is believed life was appearing under similar conditions on Earth.

"There's nothing about Mars that we know of that would have prevented life from evolving there in the same way it did on the early Earth," Rummel said.

Some Mars microbes could still be living, despite its present hostile environment.

"We are finding that organisms

can live in far more extreme conditions than we once thought possible," said Margaret S. Race, a biologist for the SETI Institute, an organization that specializes in search for extraterrestrials.

Earth microbes have been found living inside rocks, in the superheated water of undersea volcanoes and in the extreme dry and cold of the Antarctic.

But Rummel, Richmond and others believe it is very unlikely that any living Mars bug could leave an extraterrestrial plagues on the Earth.

Richmond noted that if microbial life does exist on Mars, it probably has the same genetic pattern as Earth life.

He said scientists now believe that over billions of years, Mars has been knocked there when asteroids smashed into the Red Planet. Earth probably has also landed on Mars. As a result, it is possible that life forms on the planets may have a common origin.

NASA plans to send sample collection robot landers to two different sites on Mars in 2001 and 2002. The machines would collect and store bits of rock, soil, ice and atmosphere.

In 2005, another robot would be sent to one of the sites to collect the samples and return them to Earth by 2008.

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