News from the Field

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Girl Dies After Organ Transplant Mix-Up

Jésica Santillán, 17, was a Mexican immigrant who came to the U.S. three years ago because of a heart condition. After physicians at Duke University Hospital performed a heart-lung transplant on the girl, they realized that the organs were obtained from a donor who had a different blood type. Consequently, Jésica's body immediately began rejecting the organs. New organs were obtained and transplanted into her, but she had already suffered irreversible brain damage. Two weeks after her initial transplant, Jésica died.

This situation has raised anew questions about the ethics of transplantation and the fairness with which organs are distributed. With regard to this case, some are arguing that Jésica did not receive a fair chance at survival the first time and was therefore entitled to receive the second organ transplant ahead of other waiting candidates. Others are arguing that even though the situation was a tragic one, the botched transplant left Jésica in such a poor state of health that she no longer should have been considered a possible transplant candidate. Because of the decision, not only did Jésica die, but someone else may likely die also as the result of not receiving a heart and/or lung transplant. This tragic outcome will likely prompt a serious examination of the problems plaguing organ distribution, especially in problem cases such as this.

Dolly, the First Cloned Mammal, Euthanized

The first "successful" clone, Dolly the sheep, has been euthanized. She died at the age of 6, about half the life-span of a normal sheep. She was suffering from a progressive lung infection, one that is common in older sheep. In the past year, it was made public that she suffered from problems such as arthritis that sheep typically face only in old age. Scientists familiar with Dolly indicated that she was quite young by sheep standards to be euthanized and questioned whether her condition could be linked to premature aging due to the cloning process.

A full autopsy will be performed to see if any light can be shed on her demise. Afterward, Dolly will be put on display at the National Museum of Scotland. ■

A Review of the Book
Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics

(by Leon Kass, San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002)

Donal P. O'Mathuna, Professor of Bioethics and Chemistry, Mount Carmel College of Nursing (Columbus, Ohio)

Leon R. Kass, M.D. again reveals how he thinks through bioethical issues in *Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics*. He also reveals why we can be thankful President Bush appointed him as Chair of the President's Council on Bioethics. Written in the tradition of C. S. Lewis, Hans Jonas, and Paul Ramsey, Kass delves deep in his exploration of the values, beliefs, and visions that underlie bioethical issues. Kass does not limit himself to balancing principles, juggling values, and weighing consequences. Rather, he takes on the challenging task of exploring the meaning of such difficult topics as technology, liberal democracy, and human dignity. Kass forces us to reflect at a level beyond the surface, his literal style drawing us deeper and deeper into the center of the issues. Beginning with stem cell research and cloning and continuing on to the sale of human organs, assisted suicide, and life-extension therapies, he astutely addresses various topics and themes within bioethics. Each time, Kass provides us with a different angle on what is meant by human dignity. Each time, he shows us how a specific dilemma presents us with a choice.

On the one hand, we can choose the new technology, or the new liberty (understood as "self-indulgence," not "self-rule"), taking us ever closer to Huxley's *Brave New World*. Not content merely to refer to such a scenario, Kass seeks to unveil what disturbs us about Huxley's world and shows how we have already accepted many of its beliefs, values, and goals. "What is most repulsive about the Brave New World is not inequality or lack of freedom, but dehumanization and degradation—and, worst of all, that their posthuman estate is neither regretted nor recognized by anyone, and that they aspire to nothing humanly richer or higher."

But we can instead choose against the technological "superhighway" and take a stand in defense of human dignity. Human cloning, for example, affords a unique and vitally important opportunity to do just that. "In a truly unprecedented way, we can strike a blow for the human control of the technological project, for wisdom, for prudence, for human dignity." Today, we must choose whether we shall be "slaves of unregulated innovation . . . or whether we shall remain free human beings who guide our powers toward the enhancement of human dignity."

Kass's style is refreshing, offering an approach that is deeply insightful and challenging. He critiques bioethics as it has developed over the last thirty years, being largely focused on the theoretical and philosophical. He asks whether patients are better treated and whether hospital staffs are more civil as a result of bioethical engagement. According to Kass, the problem is that bioethics neglects people's deeper motivations and concerns. The challenge is clear: "Will it be said of us that we ethicists fine-tuned our theoretical fiddles while modern Rome rocked and rolled its way back to barbarism?" Christians, especially, should be well equipped to take up this challenge, as our goal is not just to answer difficult bioethical questions but to help shape people into those who better reflect the image of God.

Having read this book once, I feel compelled to go back and re-read it, giving each argument the careful meditation it deserves. That's what makes this book essential reading—and Kass one of the most important thinkers of our day. ■