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Alarm over genetic control of embryos

Sir, We are writing in regard to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's recent consultation on what it calls "mitochondrial replacement", about which we have a number of serious ethical concerns.

In the procedures being proposed, the chromosomes of unfertilised eggs or of newly conceived embryos are, in fact, replaced, and these are clearly examples, therefore, of germ-line genetic manipulation. The reconstructed egg or embryo will have an altered genetic composition that will be inheritable. It would be the first time such intentional genetic modifications of children and their descendants were expressly permitted and would open the door to further genetic alterations of human beings with unforeseeable consequences.

Chromosomal replacement would cross the Rubicon into germ-line genetic interventions. Moreover, we are concerned that these proposals for research and possible treatment which rely on egg donation will greatly increase the possibilities for the exploitation of egg donors.

Because of the implications for all of humanity, intentional germ-line interventions are prohibited in every national jurisdiction that has considered the issue. They are also banned under a number of international legal instruments, such as the Council of Europe's Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine which prohibits the genetic modification of spermatozoa or ova for procreation.

We urge the Government to consider its international responsibilities. This is because persons created through germ-line interventions, which may subsequently be revealed to be detrimental, will be able to travel and have their own children abroad. For the UK to isolate itself from its duties by allowing "mitochondrial replacement" to take place without consulting its international partners would create a very serious precedent.

PROFESSOR DAVID JONES
 Anscombe Bioethics Centre, Oxford
 PROFESSOR FRANÇOISE BAYLIS
 Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada
 PROFESSOR ROBERT MCCORMICK,
 Princeton University
 PROFESSOR REGINE KOLLEK,
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 PROFESSOR NATALIA
 LÓPEZ-MORATALLA
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 A further 38 signatories can be seen
 online at thetimes.co.uk/letters

Does regulation threaten the freedom of t

Sir, Having read several editorials recently (yours included), I have the impression that the press is incapable of publishing an unbiased argument on press regulation — an indication in itself of the need for regulation.

Short memories abound. Media moguls and their editors seem already to have forgotten the damage caused by press intrusion and dysfunctional relationships with political parties and the police and show scant regard for the ethos of Lord Justice Leveson's proposals.

You say that the role of the free press is to hold the government to account, yet past press behaviour has done the opposite, necessitating the need for robust frameworks to hold a self-interested press to account. If this undermines its accountability function, the press has only itself to blame for having done a disservice to democracy in the UK.

ANDREW BOYD
 London W13

Sir, Your leading article "Across the Rubicon" (March 19) appears to confuse freedom and licence. True freedom exists only where there is mutual acceptance of constraints on behaviour that may cause harm to others. Press freedom is no different from other forms of freedom in that respect. We normally trust our elected governors to determine what those constraints should be. To place that responsibility in other hands can be dangerous to freedom.

We must remember that our press is the product of profit-oriented organisations, and they have clearly shown in recent years that there are areas where they need to exercise restraint.

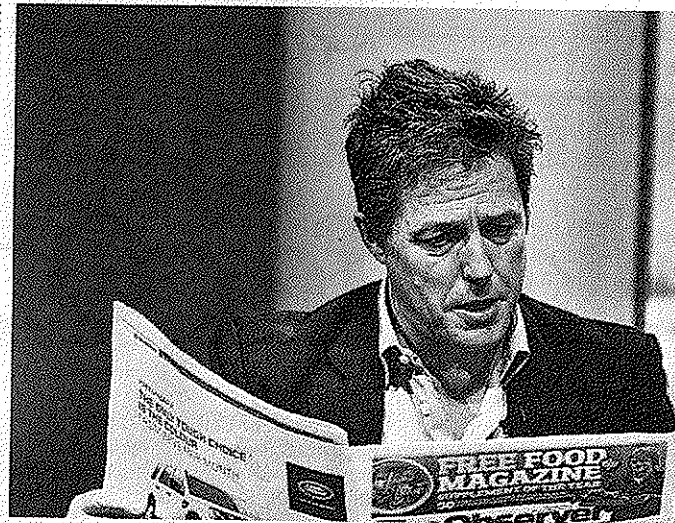
PETER DAVIES
 Long Ditton, Surrey

Sir, I was concerned to hear Hugh Grant, the face of the Hacked Off campaign, telling an interviewer that he never reads a newspaper.

Why are politicians allowing policy to be influenced by somebody who disregards the good that newspapers and a free press do for our society?

It is also a concern that many MPs cite the views of the victims of phone hacking as the chief consideration when drafting these bills. This is not how a liberal democracy works.

While it is important that victims are treated with compassion, we do



Hugh Grant, the face of Hacked Off which has helped to shape the ne

not afford the victims of other crimes a key say in the perpetrators' sentences, and quite rightly.

ALICE SHARP
 London SW11

Sir, The agreement for future press regulation will strengthen British parliamentary democracy. As a subscriber to *The Times* for more than 30 years, I trust that I shall in future be reading a newspaper participating in the new regulatory arrangements.

The agreement is a rare instance of progress through cross-party discussion. It provides the nation with a real dividend of coalition government, and would hardly have been achieved if either the Conservative or Labour parties had an overall Commons majority.

DR EDMUND MARSHALL
 (MP for Goole, 1971-83)
 Harpenden, Herts

Sir, The big fear is that a statute to regulate the press can be altered. The big protection is that the press has a loud voice with which to warn us if unacceptable changes are mooted.

How unwise then for the press to be crying foul over the proposals.

SIMON CARNE
 London W8

Sir, As a *Times* reader for almost 40 years, I have always been an admirer of your attempts to report the news in a fair and balanced way.

But your one-sided coverage of the

press regulation issue has been deeply disappointing. Every time you see more leaders, articles attacking the Hacked Off campaign and criticising the proposal from the Leveson report.

You seem to be suggesting, "the time for apologising is over" that we all forget about recent abuses. Sorry — we won't.

I believe that you are out of touch with your readers on this one. For one will not be a *Times* subscriber much longer if you fail to sign the proposed new arrangements.

GEOFF WATSON
 Bristol

Sir, In 1940 my mother wrote words on a leaflet expressing distaste at the behaviour of the soldiers in her town. Amsterdam didn't want them there. The regulator of the time, known as the censor and of course politically controlled, objected to this. She was therefore brought before a so-called court of justice and had to pay "exemplary damages". As she had no money they just put her in prison for a few months.

Fortunately for us, she and a million other like-minded people decided that freedom of free speech, of which a totally free press was a pillar, were worth fighting for. The Nazis were defeated and freedom restored.

It is perhaps fortunate that my mother did not live to see how

Science investment is key to growth

Sir, Britain is walking an economic tightrope. To reach the far end, science and innovation must be the main driving force. The spirit of inventiveness and skills which our scientists and engineers possess is a valuable asset that generates significant benefit to the UK economy and improves our lives in many ways.

Nevertheless, we look to all parties, and to today's Budget, for a long-term and sustained increase in science

investment, falling behind our international competitors. Other countries are channelling investment into their sciences, aware that this develops their national economies.

We have to learn from China, South Korea and Brazil, which have all recognised the direct link between investment in science research and economic growth.

Maintaining competitive levels of research funding is vital for attracting

Speeding up health care for the dying

Sir, We are pleased to welcome the report on the Draft Care and Support Bill by the Joint Committee. The recommendations by the committee strengthen the Bill, which will give access to care and support much more quickly for people and their carers.

We were particularly pleased that the amendment proposed by Marie Curie to fast-track me