

# CYBERLEX

## The Pandora's box of the 21st Century

The scientist's quest to understand the world and ourselves has led to the unravelling of the very building blocks of life.

Genes, genetics, biotechnology and Pandora's Box. Only one is Greek mythology, the others are creating ethical and legal issues around the world. Concerns over genetic engineering, in particular, genetically modified food and cloning and have been around for many years. Recent events have caused widespread news coverage, in particular, the calling for appropriate labelling of GM foods. This interest has also manifested into a variety of websites dealing with all manner of issues surrounding the gene.

Out of curiosity I decided to begin a search to see what was out there in the ether. I went to yahoo.com and typed in "gene". I was immediately presented with links to greats like: Gene Pitney, Gene Hackman, Gene Kelly, and Gene Wilder. Upon reflection, it was not well planned search. To use an old expression, "I got back on the horse" and tried again. Here are what I consider some of the more interesting results.

### The Centre for Law & Genetics (<http://www.lawgenecentre.org/>)

The Centre is based at the Schools of Law at the Universities of Tasmania and Melbourne. The Centre has links with the University of New Mexico, University of Glasgow, and the Max Planck Institute in Freiburg, Germany. Developed out of two projects funded by the Australian Research Council the research group, according to the website, is currently focusing its research towards investigating legal standards in relation to:

- the commercialisation of collection, storage and banking of DNA (including DNA profiling);
- privacy of genetic information;
- patenting of biotechnological inventions;
- structuring of the biotechnology industry;

- domestic and international control of commercialisation of biotechnology.

A searchable catalogue of papers, articles, briefs and caselaw on the commercialisation of genetics and its legal (the Materials Database) makes finding materials easy. I will admit to not being an expert in this field, but I did a simple search on ethics and came across an article on "wrongful life" lawsuits for faulty genetic counselling? a prime example to the complexity of issues confronting society and the law in this new era.

### Biotechnology Australia (<http://www.isr.gov.au/ba/>)

Biotechnology Australia is a multi-departmental Government agency, responsible for coordinating biotechnology issues for the Commonwealth Government. The website's stated aim is to provide balanced and factual information about biotechnology to all Australians. A link to <http://genetech.csiro.au/> provides an explanation of the science of gene technology.

### Australian Gene Ethics Network (<http://www.geneethics.org/>)

A federation of groups and individuals in Australia promoting critical discussion and debate on the environmental, social and ethical impacts of genetic engineering technologies. I must confess that I was sidetracked by the resources page asking visitors to email a variety of politicians (federal, state and territory). Denis Burke was listed as the NT Premier.

### Australian Conservation Foundation

(<http://www.acfonline.org.au/campaigns/geneethics/intro.htm>)

### Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee (GMAC)

(<http://www.health.gov.au/tga/gene/gmac/gmac.htm>)

Genetics Society of Australia (<http://gsa.angis.org.au/>)

Human Genetics Society of



Australasia (<http://www.hgsa.com.au/>)

### Vent

I am increasing frustrated by the lack of information on web pages about currency. When was the information on the page first published? When was it last modified/updated? Web sites often have information that has lost its relevance due to the passing of time, yet if you do a search you find it and are left wondering whether it is new or old. If you read web publishing standards then there are references about currency. Yet take a look around and see whether a web page provides this important information. Good luck. It is not difficult to add, yet even the big commercial sites do not provide clear statements of currency. Some sites go so far as to say certain pages are updated everyday, and then do not provide any means by which you can be assured that the page has in fact been updated. You may not use currency information everyday, but when you need it, and you can't find it? ahhh! You may recall from a previous article, currency is one measure of creditability for a site. All I can say is that most sites are lucky it is but one measure.

Do you have something that really irks you when surfing the net or about technology in general? Then vent your frustration by emailing me.

### Handheld PCs

You can probably tell that Palm is my preference, but there are a range of handheld devices offering similar functionality. Other brands include: HP; Psion; Casio; Compaq; and Philips. The right handheld computer depends entirely on you. The range of handhelds can make the decision complex and altogether too hard. For helpful advice you can search the web for reviews.

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