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Cloning: Ten Most-Asked Questions and Tentative Answers

by

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What is cloning?

Cloning is the taking of the egg of a female of the species and removing its nucleus (DNA or genetic material). Then, the dormant DNA nucleus of a cell from another of the species is placed in the first cell and, by electric shock, reactivates the dormant DNA which then begins to multiply like a fertilized cell. No male participation is necessary and the reproduction process is or can be parthenogenic. The result will be an exact genetic and biological replica of the one who gave the DNA. Once thought to be impossible, it has now been done on sheep and monkeys. While the clone is identical to its paradigm, it is not totally so. A clone's genome – its complete set of genetic material – would not be identical to its paradigm. Recombinant DNA creates a unique genome for each individual, even in those who have inherited DNA identical to another.

Is cloning harmful?

We do not know the long-term problems associated with this procedure because no empirical studies have been done. There are simply too few of these clones to produce such a study. What effects any human cloning might have is all speculative at the present time.

Can humans be cloned?

Scientists have already cloned monkeys which are primates and

therefore biologically close to humans. There is no reason why humans cannot be cloned using the same procedures as in other mammals.

Will humans be cloned?

The answer to this question, for better or worse, is yes. No amount of legislation is going to outlaw this procedure. Besides, legislation in this area does not have a good track record. In vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, sperm and ova banks, etc., at one time or another were forbidden or regulated or considered wrong. The research went on anyway, either in privately funded research facilities or in countries where the process was not regulated. For example, the United States has no statute or regulation forbidding human cloning. Other countries do. Therefore, human cloning is almost inevitable in spite of any law seeking to regulate or forbid it. Cloning will be done here or abroad.

Human cloning is therefore technically possible today. There are arguments for going forward with this technology which are therapeutic in nature. A cloned human embryo, modified genetically or not, can become a therapeutic instrument. It could synthesize different molecules and furnish biological elements of replacement, etc. But to the question of why clone humans, the answer is very complex, more complex than just a desire to care and to cure. In such a technology there is the realization of very lively fantasies of mastery over human life, an identical duplicate of oneself, engendering (one hesitates to call it birth) of a person outside of sexual bi-polarity and the constraints of a double parenthood. We are really talking about another kind of human condition. No birth, no parents, no real incarnation of flesh before, during and after birth. This may have ominous effects on the person cloned.

Can animal cloning be beneficial?

More research needs to be done in this area and both biologists and ethicists agree that such research should go forward. Such cloned genetics in animals is thought to be able to produce better livestock, disease resistance, better quality meat and more plentiful milk, etc., from genetically cloned species from the DNA of prize animals. In addition, better research on animals for human benefit will be advisable because there will be no variety in such animals used for human testing. Cloned animals may also be important sources for drugs and a medium for transplants in humans. For example, pigs can be cloned in such a way as to better transplant their organs for humans or for better production of insulin. The future in this area is full of promise so that research in the animal area should go forward.

Are there any benefits to human cloning?

It is hard to think of any which would not lead us into the dark recesses of eugenics, experimentation, partial birth abortion, dire effects on the cloned or simply vanity. The idea, for example, of replacing a dead child or parent or loved one by cloning a dying or dead person is grotesque. A person can never be replaced because each human person is a unique dignity. To clone for body parts (e.g. through partial birth abortion or after ten weeks gestation) is an abomination and murder, a denial of human rights. It is the use of a human being as a means and not an end. To clone a child for less intrusive, less invasive means may be ethical. For example, a live child or parent is dying of cancer and needs a unique bone marrow transplant. This may be a beneficial case which respects the dignity of the cloned child who will not be harmed by removal of bone marrow. This, of course, is speculative since the consent of the child is not and cannot be abolished. It would have to come from an independent and non-prejudiced source (e.g., a court).

Does a cloned person have a soul?

Of course. Just as children conceived in vitro have a soul. Moreover, cloned humans will be unique because of different influences on the child which comes from other sources in the environment. We are more than our genes. We are also a living, incarnate soul. While the genetic and biological direction of the clone and the paradigm will be identical, the different influences of culture, environment, other people, experiences of life, etc., will be different for each child, including a cloned child. We can already see this in the case of identical twins. While genetically from the same egg, they are essentially different in their personalities, having received different influences from their environments. In addition, the cloned person has an independent will and freedom as a person. A person is more than genetics and history; he or she is above all a spiritual entity with a soul.

Should humans be cloned?

Given that few, if any, benefits come from this biological process on humans, the only justification would be either vanity or curiosity. It will be done because it can be done – a moral vacuity if there ever was one. These vanity reasons are not great enough moral justification for imposing a particular genetic and biological makeup on a child. If the process cannot be justified except for the most superficial reasons, then neither can it be morally justified. Neither would cloning be an improvement of the race which is a moral, not a genetic term. In morals, every person starts from “zero”, irrespective of genetics.

What are the drawbacks of human cloning?

There are many – the whole process is a pure process of science and technology. It is not the genesis of a human person within the context of love, but pure technology. Humans are specifically different from animals in that they are brought into the world by an act of love between two people, not of technology or instinct. Cloning reduces the person to a technological production and removes the clone from the love act at origins. The clone is made, not born. There may be deep problems in such a process if allowed to go forward.

Given that what we have in cloning is a species of parthenogenesis, the function of the father as role model, support and diversity becomes even more weakened than it is today. The sexuality of the sexes as diversity becomes irrelevant and we are introduced into the brave new world of technology, technique, and unlove. Cloning is a direct threat to the family. Even a childless couple who would clone one of the two would be the technological result of one or the other, not of their union in love. It would be an affair *a un(e)*.

The temptation to the spare part syndrome will be very strong. We already take organs and brain cells from intentionally aborted fetuses for transplant into older humans (e.g. Parkinson's disease). Cloning will make this process perfect with no possible rejection in the paradigm from whom the DNA originally came. The temptation will be very great along with the further use of partial birth abortion for spare organs. Cloning is the technologizing of the whole human endeavor which turns out not to be human at all.

On an ethical plane, cloning is unacceptable. The questions it poses are numerous and radical. Who will be the clone? What is he – a double? The problems of the same DNA, fingerprinting which turns identification upside down; what of social recognition and acceptance? What forms of alienation will be experienced by such a person? What is his generational status? Whose son/daughter is he? Brother? Sister?

The real objective of scientists in this field is not just a desire to reproduce an exact duplicate and, after freezing it, wait until it is needed. They are rather interested in the possibility of starting such a development, freezing it in place at a particular stage of development and using it therapeutically for other humans. Certain neurologists think that at the tenth week of embryonic development cells can be grafted on to people with Parkinson's disease and issue a sort of cure.

But there is a very serious objection to this kind of use of human embryos at the ethical level: we are dealing here with a human embryo from whom no permission can ever be received. Being a person or on the way to being a person, a cloned embryo cannot be a therapeutic instrument

for the benefit of a third party. This would be to turn humans or near humans into means for the ends of others. Some deny this because they believe such an embryo is not human. But even in doubt, the benefit of that doubt must be given to the possibility of humanity rather than non-humanity.

Such an insurmountable obstacle to human cloning cannot really be overcome. Ever. Therefore forms of human cloning for any therapeutic purpose must be outlawed domestically and internationally. All doubt must be resolved in favor of the humanity of the embryo. Any form of experimentation in this regard is unethical and should be illegal.

In essence, what is the most serious argument against mammalian cloning in humans?

Cloning reproduces an identical DNA in the one cloned so that the second reproduces an exact genetic and biological replica of the paradigm. In humans, the cloned would have its own persona, psychology and individuation (soul) distinct from the paradigm. Depending on environment, drives, examples and other such cultural influences, the second would develop differently from the paradigm. We know something of this from the different histories of identical twins.

We also know that much is determined by genetic biology which is a vital part of that person's destiny. That particular part of the person determined by DNA in a very real sense has already been lived. What moral right does anyone have to reproduce the same DNA again and impose it on another person without his or her consent? The nature of human reproduction is a huge and unlimited source of diversity where each person is a newness on the earth, not just personality wise, but genetically and biologically as well, which makes for more diversity. In cloning, we artificially limit that diversity and force upon the cloned what has already been lived and experienced to that extent. In other words, each person coming into the world has a right to his or her uniqueness which is greatly determined by recombinant DNA.

No one has the moral right to impose on another what has already been lived. Each new person coming into the world has an absolute right to his or her own genetics, biological and personality uniqueness to be unfolded and lived in freedom. No one has the right to impose limits from the past, biological experiences already lived in the past, on another human being without his/her consent. This infinity of gene pool and its diversity is the richness of the human race, its diversity, uniqueness and difference. Cloning to a certain degree threatens that richness. Mozart's life has already been lived with its differences, uniqueness, genius. We are deeply thankful. But no one has the right to impose Mozart again on another

without his consent because that genius has already been lived in history. To repeat it is to go backwards to *deja vu*, not forward to the diversity of added and further richness of the race in every part of his/her earthly existence.

Is there any consensus among moralists about the ethics of this process?

Most are negative for the reasons already given. It is difficult to say that research in human cloning should continue because the moment you begin to have cell union of the dormant DNA in the proffered egg, you have a human person – the same as if you had an embryo from the union of a human female egg and male sperm. Such experimentation on any embryo, fertilized or cloned, has been denounced by many religions including the Vatican, which has condemned all experiments on embryos, live fetuses and now cloning as a direct assault on a non-consenting human person. Cloning is an experiment and experiments on non-consenting human persons is immoral and forbidden. This offends the fundamental dignity of the human person. For other religions, it is as yet too early to give a reasonable assessment of this procedure.
