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Bioethics of Human Cloning: Are We Playing God?

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate bioethical implications of human cloning, addressing the pivotal question: Are we playing God? Diving into the moral, ethical, and scientific aspects of human cloning, it examines historical and literary perspectives, current technological advancements, and future implications of cloning. The paper analyzes the arguments for and against human cloning, including several potential benefits for medical science, such as organ transplantation and genetic research, as well as the moral questions and societal impacts it presents. The discussion extends to philosophical and theological considerations, questioning the extent of human intervention in natural processes. The findings suggest a complex interplay between scientific innovation and ethical responsibility, urging a balanced approach to pursuing cloning technologies. This paper contributes to the ongoing debate on human cloning, offering insights and recommendations for policymakers, medical professionals, and ethicists. It aims to aid these professionals in successfully navigating the ethical minefield posed by these advancements.

Bioethics of Human Cloning: Are We Playing God?

Human cloning involves the production of a genetically identical copy of a specific human candidate through DNA replication and other advanced scientific techniques. The process of human cloning has been a scientific reality since 1998 and has faced intense bioethical debate ever since. There are two fundamental types of human cloning: therapeutic and reproductive. Therapeutic cloning is a type of cloning that produces stem cells genetically identical to those of a specific patient for scientific research. In contrast, reproductive cloning takes this a step further by implanting these cloned cells into a woman's uterus, allowing for the development of a new organism. Although some scientists argue that the moral compromises and risks brought about

by human cloning are worth the various possible scientific advancements, many others say that both therapeutic and reproductive human cloning is unnecessary due to more modern and ethical procedures, immoral because it uses human life as another manufactured tool, and dangerous if the technology got into the wrong hands.

Potential Benefits of Human Cloning

Some scientists argue that the various bioethical issues and risks posed by human cloning are vastly outweighed by the scientific advances in medicine and research it would make possible. Specifically, therapeutic cloning holds promise for replicating and examining a patient's stem cells, paving the way for a wide variety of new research into severe and rare diseases. The human immune system often rejects blood transfusions and organ transplants. However, "therapeutic cloning would allow a patient's own genetic material to be used to repair his or her damaged cells" (Barglow, 2005). The use of a patient's genetic material for organ repair and replacement, if correctly implemented, would mean a significantly lower risk for transplant surgeries overall. "There is broad consensus in the scientific community that therapeutic cloning could lead to remedies for diseases such as Alzheimer's and cancer" (Barglow, 2005). Therapeutic cloning shows the potential to aid in developing such treatments due to its yield of a sick patient's STEM cells, which are valuable because embryonic cloning of diseased cells often helps scientists understand the inception and development of rare and severe diseases (Barglow, 2005).

Furthermore, a few scientists argue that the process of reproductive human cloning should be used as a treatment for infertility. According to Glenn McGee, a renowned ethicist and professor of health at Salem College, "proponents of cloning suggested it might serve as a new, unusual but perhaps efficacious treatment for infertility, enabling those unable to pass genes to

future generations to do so in a way that is at least analogous to the familial linkage of twins” (McGee, 2005). However, the creation of life by man can easily lead to many separate ethical issues. The result of a new life, or in essence, a new species of human, begs the question of how that life will be treated within society. When looking for answers concerning human society, especially how people will view a new aspect of that society, it is often beneficial to investigate literature to gain a distinct perspective on human experience. One possibility of how natural-born humans may view this new class of person can be seen in *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. In the novel, Victor Frankenstein creates life but soon turns his back on it because it is different from other normal humans. The monster attempts to find humans who accept him but is rejected many times, eventually voicing his frustration with the words, “All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things” (Shelly, 1994). This narrative serves as a cautionary tale, suggesting that individuals born through reproductive cloning might face similar alienation and a diminished quality of life compared to those born naturally. Therefore, despite its potential benefits in addressing infertility, reproductive cloning raises significant ethical concerns about the societal acceptance and well-being of the individuals it produces, leading to the argument that it should be prohibited.

Ethical Alternatives in Stem Cell Research: Beyond Cloning

Many scientists and bioethicists see both therapeutic and reproductive cloning as unnecessary due to the emergence of more modern and ethical methods that can be used for STEM cell research. A notable example is harvesting some specific adult tissues, which serve as reservoirs for STEM cells. Some of these tissues, like the placenta, are often obtained during gestation or at term with no harm to the patient or newborn. Placental STEM cells, especially

amniotic epithelial cells, are renowned for their applications in skin and corneal transplantation, acting as scaffolds to promote epithelialization (Pipino et al., 2012).

Additionally, human mesenchymal stromal cells, MSCs, have a high capacity for self-renewal in culture (Pipino et al., 2012). This self-renewal property could prove helpful to scientists' development of treatments for organ failure. Also, the placental MSCs' plasticity is not dissimilar to that which the embryonic STEM cells found in therapeutic cloning are known for (Pipino et al., 2012). Cell plasticity is the ability of a cell to change from one type to another. This is important to research because it allows scientists to study how a disease affects several types of cells. The MSCs derived from the placenta while still in gestation are especially valuable as they display several ontological translationally advantageous properties (Pipino et al., 2012). In layman's terms, this means that placental MSCs can be used more than therapeutically cloned STEM cells to further cancer research. Although therapeutic cloning has its advantages, such as lab reproducibility, the undeniable research benefits of using MSCs and placental STEM cells and the ability to procure these cells ethically prove that they should be more widely implemented in place of therapeutic cloning.

Religious Perspectives and Ethical Considerations in Human Cloning

The ethical preference for collecting adult tissues over therapeutic cloning is highlighted by religious views that consider life to begin at the first cell cluster, clusters that therapeutic cloning utilizes for research. Many religions, notably Christianity, view both types of human cloning as not only highly immoral but also as a challenge to divine authority. There are many different religions around the world, and their opinions on the morality of human cloning tend to differ. "Judaism holds a fairly positive view of cloning. One of the fundamental tenets of Judaism is that God wants human beings to use all of their capacities to improve the health of

others. In addition, Jewish law does not recognize the human embryo as a human being” (Woodward, 2005, p. 4). These fundamental beliefs mean that most Jewish people believe in therapeutic cloning. However, few Jews are in support of reproductive cloning. People of the Jewish religion are inclined to see reproductive cloning as an insult to God's authority and disagree with its implementation in society.

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church “is adamantly opposed to any form of human cloning and has worked to mobilize political opposition to it. The official position of the church is that life begins at conception” (Woodward, 2005, p. 5). Alongside the Roman Catholics, Christians tend to disapprove of both types of human cloning. According to the Christian Bible, “Jesus says, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, John 3:5-6). If humans were to create a group of human clones, the argument could be made that said clones possess no God-given spirit and, therefore, could not enter heaven. With that perspective, it may be considered unethical to create human clones because they would be like us in every emotional aspect except that they would be unable to enter heaven.

Catholic Archbishop William Keeler voices his concerns about the dehumanizing effects of cloning. He argues that reproductive cloning would pervert the basic relationships of a single person and would represent a significant step in making life into “simply another one of the man-made things” (Kass, 1997, as cited in Keeler, 2001, p. 46). The dehumanization of human clones could lead to class differences between natural people and cloned people and may cause other ethical issues, such as clone slavery. Ironically, the most shocking evidence proving the dehumanizing nature of cloning is found in policies aimed at legalizing therapeutic human

cloning for research. The guidelines propose the creation of human embryos specifically for analysis, after which the embryos must be destroyed. Keeler argues that therapeutic cloning would produce life without actual parents and thus without protectors for the explicit purpose of experimentation and eventual destruction (2001).

The concept of destroying one's own creation can be again paralleled with literature through Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* due to Victor's wish to destroy his own creation. The monster calls Victor out on the moral wrongness of his desire, saying, "Listen to me, [Victor]. You accuse me of murder; and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man!" (Shelley, 1994). Although human cloning has various potential medical benefits, its implementation should be highly regulated due to the complex ethical landscape surrounding the issue. Human cloning can prove to be a metaphorical, slippery slope, and scientists may find themselves sliding toward methods that dehumanize and even harm the human clones themselves.

Ethical and Societal Risks in the Advancement of Human Cloning

Scientists generally agree on both bioethical and physical dangers posed by the development of human cloning if it were to get into the wrong hands. Therapeutic or research, cloning can be considered the first step towards a change, for the worse, in the way society works. The practice of research cloning provides bioethical dangers because it enables other morally problematic activities as it lays the technological groundwork for "cloning-to-produce-children" (The Witherspoon Council, 2015). This new technology could lead to fetal farming, or growing cloned embryos to a later stage so that their valuable organs can be harvested for transplants (The Witherspoon Council, 2015). The technology could also facilitate the genetic engineering of children, as it already has for animals, which could cause a massive rift in society

(The Witherspoon Council, 2015). On the other hand, reproductive cloning could lead to physical dangers to humanity, such as the obsolescence of the natural human. According to Woodward, clones with genetic enhancements for strength and intelligence may become the new standard, changing society for the worse by causing the natural human to become obsolete (2005). From a Christian perspective, “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Gen. 1:27). People of the Christian faith and neighboring faiths may begin to fear genetically enhanced individuals due to their departure from God’s image. Similar societal fears are prominent in literature and can be compared to Victor’s fear of his monster's inhuman strength and intelligence, as depicted in *Frankenstein*. Although human cloning may provide some benefits through medical research, scientists should avoid the pursuit of modern technology surrounding human cloning because of the bioethical and physical dangers of human cloning to society.

Conclusions and Discussion

Human cloning should be tightly regulated because it is no longer necessary, it was never ethical, and it is a dangerous practice if it were to get into the wrong hands. The method of human cloning can be considered similar in its ambition to the force that drove Victor in *Frankenstein* to create his monster in the first place. Human cloning is no longer necessary. The discovery of more research-effective and ethically procurable placental STEM cells and MSCs make therapeutic human cloning obsolete and could lead to even more remarkable medical discoveries. Human cloning is unethical. Several religions see human cloning as an insult to God as a divine creator, and some religions, such as Catholicism, believe that life begins with the first clump of cells. Also, human cloning could grow into several other ethical issues, such as the use

of fully grown human clones for harvesting valuable organs and even the use of human clones as slaves. Human cloning is dangerous if it gets into the wrong hands. Widespread human cloning could lead to genetic engineering to an extent that would make the natural human obsolete. This obsolescence of the natural-born human would lead to massive class rifts between engineered and genuine people, changing society for the worse. Victor's ambition and disregard for morality brought only anguish for Victor himself, those he loved, and even his creation. Works of literature such as *Frankenstein* can teach a powerful lesson. Scientists should not fall into the same traps as Victor and should keep their ambition concerning human cloning in check. To summarize, human cloning should be tightly regulated in both therapeutic and reproductive forms because there is too much risk to society and too many ethical questions raised to justify its rewards.

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