

Dignity

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Inside:

Human Cloning: What's at Stake

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Amid the current debate over cloning not nearly enough attention is being paid to the children who may be produced through cloning. When attention is paid to the clones themselves, often people ask: Are clones human beings? Are they of the same moral status as the rest of us? Do they have souls?

A human individual brought into existence by cloning would be a member of the species homo sapiens. He or she would possess a human genetic structure and a rational nature. There is no reason to suppose that such a person would not possess the same basic dignity and be endowed with the same fundamental rights as everybody else.

Yet it is predictable that cloned children—as products of ethically dubious asexual reproduction—will be viewed by some as inferior, much the way that many people once looked down on children born out of wedlock.

So let us be clear from the start: The wrong that is done in human cloning is not being done by the children who are clones. Just as we would never hold the horrible injustice and abuse of rape against a child conceived in that act, we should not hold cloning against the clones.

All human cloning—all creation of new human beings by asexual processes—should be legally prohibited. Yet even with proper

laws in place, it is likely that someday someone would break the laws, creating and bringing to term a cloned human, or perhaps several such persons. It is important that we acknowledge in advance their human dignity and fundamental rights.

But the likelihood of such a birth by no means suggests that this demeaning practice should remain legal. Why not?

“At the deepest level, cloning should be prohibited because it turns procreation into a species of manufacture. It treats a child-to-be as an object of production.”

At the deepest level, cloning should be prohibited because it turns procreation into a species of manufacture. It treats a child-to-be as an object of production. In the

words of Dr. Leon Kass, Chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics, cloning “threatens the dignity of human procreation, giving one generation unprecedented genetic control over the next. It is the first step toward a eugenic world in which children become objects of manipulation and products of will.”

Cloning also carries high risks of bodily harm to the child produced through cloning. Experiments in the cloning of animals reveals that a high percentage of clones of any mammalian species are born with, or develop, severe deformities or abnormalities. Indeed, Dolly the sheep, the most famous of all cloned mammals, was afflicted with a grave premature arthritis. Recently, South Korean cloning researchers have presented compelling evidence to this effect at the UN

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Imagine an experimental genetic procedure that, if attempted on a hundred human infants, would probably deform or kill most of them. Anyone who attempted such a procedure would be considered a moral monster. It would be scandalous for a society to permit such goings-on.

That is why almost everyone who has staked out a position in the debate about cloning—including those who do not accept Dr. Kass's argument that cloning is inherently wrong because it transforms procreation into a form of production—favor a ban on cloning to produce children, at least until the day comes (if it ever comes) when cloning can be done safely.

Of course, some people try to distinguish "reproductive cloning," that is, cloning to produce a child, from what they call "therapeutic" or research cloning—the creation of human embryos for experimental purposes in which they would be killed to harvest stem cells. This, however, is a false distinction.

All cloning is reproductive. A human embryo—the being created by human cloning—is nothing less than a human being in the earliest stages of natural development. You and we and everybody else on the planet were at an earlier stage of our lives human embryos, just as every reader of these words was once a toddler, and before that an infant, and before that a fetus.

Furthermore, no cloning is, properly speaking, "therapeutic." Cloning in the cause of biomedical experimentation is of no benefit to the subject of cloning, namely, the cloned embryo. On the contrary, that embryo is killed for the putative benefit of others.

It is clear that a ban on cloning to pro-

duce children will only be effective if all cloning is banned. A mere prohibition of the implantation of cloned embryos will not hold up. There will be no effective way to prevent embryos created by cloning from being implanted in the prepared uterus of a willing woman. We would not tolerate the degree to which our reproductive activity would have to be monitored to insure that no violations occurred. And no one, we trust, would favor forced abortions for women who become pregnant with cloned children.

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A ban on implantation, rather than on cloning itself, would moreover raise serious moral and constitutional questions. In effect, it would amount to a legal man-

date requiring the destruction of embryos. At a minimum, those who create cloned embryos would be forced to relegate these nascent human beings permanently to frozen storage.

Supporters of so-called "therapeutic cloning" insist that it is justified because of its promise to help devise treatments or cures for many dreaded diseases. Of course, this is a worthy end; the ethical problem is with the means they propose to use.

It is not simply that supporters have grossly hyped the "therapeutic" value of cloning—although this itself is an ethical issue inasmuch as it has unfairly elevated the hopes of many people suffering with neurodegenerative diseases and other afflictions. Let us not forget that the worst research atrocities in history have resulted from succumbing to the temptation to pursue scientific progress at the expense of a relatively small group who have been harmed in the process.

The utilitarian idea that we can justify doing "a little" evil for the sake of a "greater" good should be firmly rejected. The norm that should control our scientific ethics, and our law, is the principle

of the inherent dignity of every human being, irrespective of age, size, location, stage of development, or condition of dependency. Human beings—from the embryonic stage to adulthood—are always ends in themselves, and must never be treated as mere means to other people's ends.

This principle of inherent dignity should be applied with no less force to the cloned human being who is brought to birth and dwells among us. Once a human being exists, he or she is of no less value or dignity by virtue of the wrongful means by which he or she was brought into existence. Just as a human clone should not be killed before birth, he or she should not be discriminated against or in any way mistreated after he or she is born. The great political principle of human equality, rooted in the profound theological idea that men and women are made in the very image and likeness of God, demands no less. ■

"Review of *Eternal Sunshine*" Continued from page 4

Though far from being true of the general populace, Hollywood is indeed grappling with neuroethical issues. The upcoming movie *The Final Cut* zeroes in on the use of memory manipulation techniques not to eradicate recollections of relationships gone wrong—but of *humans gone wrong* as manifest by sin. Surely, we must not sit back and allow the movie industry's considerations and conclusions regarding neuroethical issues to outstrip our own. ■

¹ Steven J. Marcus (ed.) *Neuroethics: Mapping the Field* (Conference Proceedings: May 13-14, 2002, San Francisco, California). New York, NY: The Dana Foundation, 2002.

² <http://www.lacunainc.com> (accessed June 20, 2004).