

LifeNOTES

Cloning: No Longer Science Fiction

As we stand at the beginning of a new century, researchers have begun to bombard our nation and the rest of the world with questions of how far science can and should go? Since the pursuit of scientific breakthroughs and discoveries continues unfettered, our world is continually threatened with attacks on the sanctity of human life. Organizations and individuals that advocate human cloning are attempting to erode the basis for individual rights. Human life is not a commodity that should be copied and manipulated but a gift that should be respected.

The following is a fact sheet on human cloning. It contains information on the process of cloning, cloning advocates, legislation on cloning, and Right to Life of Michigan's policy on cloning.

How Cloning Works

Cloning, also called somatic cell nuclear transfer, is a process of bypassing sexual reproduction and using science to produce a genetic twin of an organism. In this process, the nucleus of a somatic cell (any 'body' cell other than an egg or sperm) is placed in an unfertilized egg cell where the nucleus has been removed. A small electric jolt is then used to stimulate the development of this being.

If the embryo survives for 5-6 days in culture, its fate depends on the goals of the research. If the researcher wants the embryo to be born, then the embryo is placed in a surrogate womb and continues to develop. If the researcher wants to experiment on the embryo, the embryo is disposed of and its life is ended when it is no longer useful.

Even though cloning was once considered science fiction, it became a reality on February 27, 1997. On this date, English scientists announced that they had used the process described above to create a cloned sheep named Dolly. In this experiment it took 277 attempts at cell manipulation and 29 embryo implants before Dolly was born¹. This means that 276 sheep embryos, fetuses, and newborns died to create a single sheep. Would it be right to sacrifice 276 human lives for each cloned human?

Since the production of Dolly, scientists have been able to clone various kinds of animals including monkeys, pigs, mice, and cows.

Mad Scientists or Humanitarian Doctors?

When reports of animal cloning became public knowledge, our society soon realized that Adlous Huxley's "Brave New World" wasn't far from reality and that the atrocity of human cloning was a future possibility.

This fear grew when Severino Antinori, an Italian doctor, and Panos Zavos, an American researcher, announced their plans to use cloning as a method of producing children for infertile couples. They hoped to begin producing cloned embryos as soon as November 2001. Their ultimate goal is to initiate pregnancy in 200 women, some of whom are from the United States. Since cloning is illegal in much of Europe, Antinori has yet to say exactly where his research is taking place¹.

Another group that advocates human cloning is the Raelians. The Raelian Movement, "the world's largest UFO-related organization counting 55,000 people in 84 countries," believes that "life on Earth was created scientifically in laboratories by extraterrestrials." Their leader, RAEL, founded CLONAIID, which they claim "is the first company offering to clone human beings." Their "projects" are supposedly being undertaken by French doctor Brigitte Boisselier who is a "Bishop" in their organization. Dr. Boisselier joined Dr. Antinori when he made his cloning announcement in August 2001. Dr. Boisselier had been working on a project for Mark Hunt, a former state legislator from West Virginia, to clone his son who died at 10-months. Hunt canceled the venture, for which he spent as much as \$500,000, when Boisselier said she would continue research in spite of an order to stop the cloning research from the Food and Drug Administration².

Research to clone humans has received widespread condemnation from many animal cloning experts. These experts, including some from the Roslin Institute, which created the first cloned sheep Dolly, have said that the cloning technique is too dangerous to use on humans. In animal cloning experiments there have been high rates of failures and defects. A recent study by researchers at MIT found serious abnormalities in cloned mice. Rudolf Jaenisch, the senior author of this study, said, "This study confirms the suspicions of many of us that cloning of humans would be really dangerous⁴."

Cloning advocates say that they plan to screen the embryos before implanting them to avoid genetic complications. But Ian Wilmut, one of the researchers that made Dolly said, "It is not possible to think of a way of screening out effectively the most appropriate embryos, and hence, what we should expect would be late abortions -- either occurring spontaneously or being induced deliberately in the second or third trimester of pregnancy -- in order to prevent the birth of abnormal children."

For one human clone to be born and survive, it would require many unborn and born cloned children to die in the process. The odds of Dr. Antinori's and Dr. Boisselier's cloned children being born alive and surviving are very small. The Roslin Institute's statistics show that the success rate for cloning in animals is "typically between 0 and 3 percent."

Are these scientists attempting human cloning in order to make headlines and become famous? Or maybe they sincerely hope to help infertile couples? We'll probably never know. However, we do know that human cloning is something that can't be tolerated. Human life must be respected and cherished, not experimented on and copied. Advocates of reproductive cloning seem to ignore the opinions of experts and ethical guidelines on their quests to be the first to clone a human.

Misguided “Therapy”

With the emergence of embryonic stem cells, the term “therapeutic cloning” has been introduced into the debate surrounding human cloning. Besides being linguistically misleading, this term seems to indicate that there is more than one type of cloning, but the only difference between so-called therapeutic cloning and reproductive cloning is the clone’s purpose in life. While reproductive cloning tries to create a being whose purpose is to be born, therapeutic cloning tries to create a being whose only purpose in life is to be destroyed for medical research.

Many biotech companies hope to use cloning as a way of mass producing human embryos in order to remove their stem cells. Embryonic stem cells aren’t from a person’s own body so they face the risk of the patient’s body rejecting them. Researchers had hoped to get around this problem by using cloning to create embryonic clones of patients and then destroy the clones in order to harvest their stem cells. Unfortunately, this “therapy” isn’t very helpful to the unborn child whose only utilitarian purpose in life is to be sacrificed for the patient.

This method of “therapy” is another step in the attempt to destroy the sanctity of human life. Humans are no longer unique individuals with God-given rights, but we are becoming disposable products that can be experimented on and then thrown away when we are no longer useful. “Therapeutic cloning” allows scientists to hide behind the guise of helping sick people while concealing the fact that the “therapy” was created through the destruction of living human embryos.

How Does the Public View Human Cloning?

Polls have consistently shown that an overwhelming majority of the public is opposed to human cloning in any circumstances. A *Time/CNN* poll in February of 2001 showed that 80% of respondents said that it wasn’t appropriate for an infertile couple to have a child using cloning, 75% said that cloning wasn’t acceptable if used to save the life of a person being cloned, and 72% said that cloning wasn’t justified if it were to produce vital organs used to save the lives of others.

An ABC News poll in August 2001 found that 87% of participants thought that it should be against the law to produce a child through cloning. A Gallup Poll in May of 2001 found that 89% of Americans think that human cloning should not be allowed.

Another poll conducted by International Communications Research in June of 2001, found that 84.6% of the American public think infertile couples shouldn’t be allowed to use cloning to produce children. On another question, 86% of the participants said scientists shouldn’t be allowed to use human cloning to create a supply of human embryos to be destroyed in medical research.

Cloning Banned in Michigan

On June 3, 1998, Michigan became the first state to ban human cloning. The Cloning Prohibition Package made cloning a felony, punishable by up to ten years in jail and a ten million dollar fine. It also imposed a licenses/registration revocation of 3-10 years for health professionals that attempt to clone humans and prohibited any state funds from being used for human cloning. Senator Loren Bennett, an author to one of the bills in the package said, “This legislation boils down to one thing: Prohibiting the creation of human life for scientific research. Human cloning is wrong now; it will be wrong five years from now; and wrong 100 years from now!”⁵

Federal Legislation to Stop Human Cloning

On July 31, 2001, the United States House of Representatives voted to ban human cloning with the help of prolife Rep. Bart Stupak (D-1) of Michigan. The bill that was passed, known as the Weldon-Stupak bill, included a prohibition against any kind of cloning, including “therapeutic cloning.” Some members of Congress wanted to pass a separate bill, known as the Greenwood bill, that would allow “therapeutic cloning” and outlaw reproductive cloning for 10 years. This bill was described by many in the prolife community as the “clone and kill” bill since all of the cloned embryos would have to be destroyed.

The United States Senate will decide the fate of S.B. 790 from Senator Sam Brownback, which is identical to the Weldon-Stupak bill. Until the Senate Bill is passed, human cloning is still a legal possibility in the United States.

Right to Life of Michigan Policy Statement on Cloning

Right to Life of Michigan finds human cloning to be an inherent violation of human dignity. As with abortion and assisted reproductive technologies, such as in vitro fertilization, human cloning research denies the most fundamental of human rights -- the right to life. The research process inevitably requires scientists to destroy and discard their ‘failed’ experiments. For example, it took 277 attempts at cell manipulation and 29 embryo implants before the sheep, Dolly, was produced.

Cloning would further violate human dignity by denying the intrinsic value of each human life, thereby viewing human beings as products or commodities. For this same reason we already oppose surrogate parenting contracts, genetic screening of embryos before uterine implanting and sex selection abortion.

Cloning could not possibly respect the intrinsic value of the person created, because a cloned person will not be created simply for their value as a person. There will always be an intended and specific utility attached to a cloned person because he or she was created with a particular genetic make-up for some purpose. Any action taken to create or destroy human beings based on their genetic qualities denies their intrinsic value.

Right to Life of Michigan strongly advocates for the passage of tightly written legislation at the national and state levels that will permanently ban all human cloning including research on embryos. If human cloning proceeds, our minds can conjure up many scenarios of abuse of human cloning as our narcissistic society creates human beings not in God’s own image but in our own.

References:

¹ Wilmut, I., Schnieke, A. E., McWhir, J., Kind, A. J., and Campbell. K. H. S. 1997. “*Viable offspring derived from fetal and adult mammalian cells.*” Nature 385: 810 - 813

² The Grand Rapids Press, August 7, 2001, “*Human cloning project in works*”

³ The Boston Globe, June 8, 2001, “*W. Va. Lawyer Sought to Develop Clone of Son*” by Joe Lauria

⁴ Detroit News July 6, 2001, “*Study reveals cloning flaw*” by Paul Recer

⁵ The Office of Governor John Engler