HUMAN CLONING AND HUMAN RIGHTS: AN ETHICO-THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

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ABSTRACT

Ethical and theological debates concerning human cloning are getting more intense as cloning technology continues to develop. This has led to debates originating from both secular ethics and Christian theological perspectives. This paper aims to coordinate the debate according to these two perspectives. It will draw from the positions of Christian theology, the position of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the positions of scientific authorities. It will conclude by stressing the importance of regulating new technologies in a manner which recognizes the shared ethico-theological concerns for human dignity, rights, freedoms, and the moral growth of humanity.

Keywords: Human Cloning; Human Dignity; Ethics, Theology.

Introduction

Religions have always recognized the dignity of the human individual as deriving from its relationship to God. This is gradually being challenged by scientific and technological advances. The growth of therapeutic cloning and reproductive cloning research and increasing potential to alter or replicate the human being is beginning to lead to

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deep ethical and religious debates. It is important to note that since the Industrial Revolution (IR), there have been both optimistic and cautionary expectations of technological for societal transformation. And this is no different with cloning technologies. Many recognize that while it is important to support the freedom of inquiry and discovery, scientific adventurism has to be reined in. We find both the United Nations (UN) declaration concerning the cloning of humans and the social teachings of the Catholic Church cover the same ground in their dedication towards human salvific welfare and care for the future of humankind. Church teachings are intended to provide a methodical approach to human problem-solving which emphasizes collaboration and hope, and fosters human dignity, diversity and plurality. This is an important consideration as we face the major difficulties that are unfolding in the twenty-first century.

Human cloning can be considered in two ways. Therapeutic cloning would involve the creation of a replica of a cell or tissue to be used for medical therapy. Reproductive cloning would involve the creation of a replica of a human being as a whole. Such cloning has been proposed as a means of enhancing humanity's genetic potential, but there are many insurmountable challenges and disadvantages. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the research and debate on human cloning from the perspectives of secular ethics and Christian theology in order to offer solutions to the issues affecting humanity as a result of the current advancement of the technology. The paper argues that despite its potentials, human cloning needs to be critically examined. This paper intends to aid in this ethical and theological critical examination, by affirming the Church's social teachings.

Human Cloning

Creating duplicates of a biological entity, ranging from an individual gene, a cell, or a human being, is known as cloning. The concept of human cloning was initially proposed by J.B.S. Haldane, who borrowed the words "clone" and "cloning," from agriculture.[2] In

this paper, the term, "human cloning" will be used interchangeably with such terms as "gene mutation" (a modification of a gene's DNA sequence that results in a different product), "genetic engineering" (a technique that modifies an organism's DNA using technology developed in labs), and "therapeutics" (which entails the creation of a cloned embryo with the sole objective therapeutic treatments.[3] In therapeutic cloning, human cells would be reproduced for use in treatments and organ transplants. Even though it is a topic of ongoing study, as of 2023, it is not employed in any medical settings worldwide. Somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT) and induced pluripotency are two popular techniques for therapeutic cloning that are currently being studied. Reproductive cloning is the replication of an entire human organism. Instead of only replicating certain cells or organs, reproductive cloning would include creating a human being from scratch.[4] By extracting the genetic material from the egg and inserting the cell nucleus into the oocyte, which would be subsequently induced to begin embryonic development, it is possible to clone an animal via SCNT.

In animal research, Dolly the Sheep was the first animal to be cloned from an adult cell.[5] But although mammals have sometimes been cloned successfully, the procedure often ends in miscarriages and other forms of failure. Ayala points out that animal clones often have serious health problems, like being overweight, dying young, having deformed limbs, and having weak immune systems.[6] What is more common is the cloning of stem cells from cloned human embryos to fix damaged nerve cells, to generate organs for transplants and other medical treatments. Many scientists contend that it is not yet possible to clone a person because the required advanced medical technology does not yet exist.

The History of the Human Cloning Debate

To understand how to evaluate genetic research from a theological and philosophical point of view, it is important to look at the history of the debate. This can be divided in four stages. The first stage in the discussion began in the 1960s. This early debate was prompted by new forms of control over reproduction, such as the accessibility of birth

control pills and technologically assisted reproduction, such as in-vitro fertilization (IVF). Also important was the potential for cloning preferred genotypes to avoid harmful genes which might endanger the survival of the human species.[7] Charles Curran, Bernard Haring, Richard McCormick, Karl Rahuer, Joseph Fletcher, and Paul Ramsey are just a few of the notable theologians who participated in these early debates regarding genetic engineering and human cloning. Given the current state of the debates, the latter two, Joseph Fletcher and Paul Ramsey, staked out diametrically opposed stances. Compared to the hereditary roulette of sexual reproduction, human cloning, in Fletcher's opinion, is a better method of reproduction.[8] Laboratory reproduction, according to him, is still radically human since it is intentional, planned, decided upon, and willed. Ramsey, on the other hand, viewed cloning as a moral problem that could only be crossed at the risk of jeopardizing the future of reproduction and humankind.[9] He speaks of the border-crossings of cloning, first a horizontal one between one person to another, and a vertical border-crossing – between the person to God.

The first IVF infant, called "Louise Brown," was born in 1978, marking the start of the second period of theological as well as philosophical debates about human cloning.[10] Although Christian theologians focused on the moral questions raised by IVF, Jewish intellectuals like Seymour Siegel and Fred Rosner focused on human cloning. They were not as critical of human cloning as Ramsey or as supportive of it as Fletcher was.[11] The United Church of Christ provided the first official protestant response to the cloning debate in 1977. It developed its own broad summary of the science and morality of human cloning. During this time, other religious organizations, including the World Council of Churches in 1975, 1982, and 1989, as well as the National Council of Churches of Christ in 1980, 1983, and 1986, also released resolutions or position statements cautiously endorsing genetic intervention strategies for certain therapeutic purposes.[12] Campbell opines that when some religious leaders expressed their opinions on genetic engineering in 1979, the then-United States President Jimmy Carter asked the President's Commission for the

Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research to look into the scientific, moral, and social implications of gene splicing.[13]

The third period of the theological and philosophical debate began in 1993, after conflicting responses to the blastomeric differentiation of embryonic cells at George Washington University. Initially, the Roman Catholic Church vehemently objected, branding the study as intrinsically wicked in a Vatican editorial.[14] Moreover, according to the conservative Protestants, the study went against their core beliefs in personhood and humanity. Some Protestants, on the other hand, acknowledged the research's potential medicinal advantages and preferred regulation over an outright ban.[15] With the unprecedented cloning of Dolly the Sheep, religious disputes entered their fourth and most current phase. The Catholic and Protestant organizations reiterated their prior stances in this instance. On the other hand, several other Protestant theologians have voiced cautious approval for cloning studies and human cloning in light of the notion of human cooperation with continuous divine creative activity.

In this renewed discussion of the ethics and morality of cloning research and its applications for human cloning, the testimony given to the USA National Bioethics Advisory Commission (NBAC) in the public hearings on March 13 and 14, 1997, offers the most carefully considered statements of theological examination.[16] From the historical survey discussed above, some general yet normative generalizations may be made including extended theological and philosophical discussion of the question of human cloning that foreshadows and clarifies much of the current debate; proof that there are several valid religious and philosophical viewpoints on human cloning; proof that both theological and secular philosophical positions reflect societal pluralism; that despite advancements in scientific knowledge and technical prowess, the values that underlie theological and philosophical objections to human cloning have proven resilient and persistent, influencing public debate on the issue; and that the religious debate is no longer restricted to theologians with formal training; It has grown to include other occupations, such

as science, other religions, and the education of religious believers. This indicates that theological and religious positions have advanced to become knowledgeable moral discourse groups on concerns relating to reproductive and advanced genetic technology.

Human Cloning Prospects

Although it had been a matter of discussion since the early modern period, scientists and decision-makers have begun to more seriously investigate the technology in terms of its potential benefits. Cloning embryonic cells to produce pluripotent or even other stem cells that may be utilized for organ transplantation, regenerative medicine, or to cure or prevent illness is known as stem cell therapy.[17] A common type of stem cell therapy is bone marrow transplantation, and stem cells can be utilized to treat sickle cell anemia. Growing organs for transplantation using stem cells that include the genome of the organ recipient is one of the most promising uses of therapeutic cloning. The therapeutic development of nerve cells is a regenerative medical application that has been investigated.[18] Mitochondrial replacement (MR) is a kind of gene therapy that modifies the embryo but so far has had a poor success rate.[19] Whether these technologies can be developed in an advantageous manner is still uncertain and disputed.

One of the benefits of human advanced cloning technology is that it has contributed knowledge about human developmental biology. Human pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs), provide information and insights into human embryogenesis. Prospectively, several developmental illnesses and abnormalities may be resolved by researching signal transmission and genetic modification in the developing human embryo.[20] Researchers studying the developmental trajectory of humans have found greater support for the idea that these pathways are similar across species. In addition to serving as model systems for the development of new drugs, induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) and cells produced via SCNT are important for studying the origins of most human and animal illnesses. Additionally, research is being carried out to see whether stem cell

treatment can be used to cure cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and injuries to the spinal cord in the future.[21] Thus, stem cell treatment can be used, as it involves the application of stem cells to cure or eliminate a disease or condition. While genetic engineering is not yet used in clinical settings, it is actively being studied. The promise of iPSCs as a dependable source for producing human neurons currently demonstrates the possibility for regenerative therapy in the brain and for neural ailments.

Most scholars have argued that human cloning might be a safe and successful means of human and animal reproduction, enabling couples who are resistant to current infertility therapy to have genetically related children. Others have argued that human cloning can also be utilized to prevent the transfer of detrimental genetic characteristics to children. According to Trounson and DeWitt, the Human Genome Project (HGP) has uncovered the genetic underpinnings of many illnesses and is now starting to identify the specific location of genes considered to be responsible for them.[22] Thus, couples seeking to prevent harmful gene transfer may find human cloning appealing since it does not require the intentional eradication of defective embryos. In addition, it is considered that cloning could help single people and same-sex couples who want to become pregnant without the assistance and possible complications of gamete donors. However, it is postulated that lesbian couples who utilize donor artificial insemination may face concerns about parenthood if they use donor gametes.[23] Advanced cloning technology may also be utilized to help parents who have lost a child and to remove gamete donors from the reproduction equation. Others, however, dispute whether the benefits of conception in this way and under these conditions would extend to the cloned child. As a result of the above, advanced cloning technology would be acceptable to an uncompromising utilitarian in this situation if the benefits were seen to exceed the demerits.

One cannot talk about cloning potentials without talking about its potential risks or drawbacks. The most significant concern involves its effectiveness and safety, the danger to the clone's uniqueness, and the possibility of lessening the diversity of distinctive genomes born into

the world. Cloning creates life, yet it detaches it from the cell donor's formative environment.[24] Human clones would be created in anticipation for future medical treatments, but the problem would involve human clones becoming commodities. While it might be argued that the negative aspects of eugenics is being advanced via the use of cloning technology, history has shown that eugenics may be practiced without the use of cloning, as illustrated by the Holocaust, cultural genocide, and laws requiring forced sterilization.[25] Cloning humans does provide parents with the option of selecting phenotypes and genotypes that would come together to create their children. While this seems unlikely to give any impact on society at large, it is still something to be considered.

Human Dignity

Cloning ethics refers to a range of ethical perspectives on the use and potential of cloning, particularly human cloning. To treat patients who are ineligible for transplants, prevent immunosuppressive medications, and delay the consequences of ageing, proponents advocate the development of therapeutic cloning. The debate concerning the use of stem cells from embryos, which is related to the debates concerning abortion, is the main point of contention for opponents of cloning technology. However, religious believers are split, with some believing that human cloning as an advanced medical technology usurps the divine's role in creation while others perceive no conflict between Christian beliefs and the possibly life-saving effects of the advanced medical technology.

To explore further the relation between ethical and theological debates on cloning, we can focus on the idea of human dignity which is recognized by both secular scholars and the Church itself. Both recognize that a fair society must respect human dignity; therefore, all technological and scientific advancements must be motivated by an understanding of the balancing of the individual with responsibility to society.

The Magisterium of the Church has praised the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for its positive contributions, which Pope John Paul II referred to as a significant turning point in humanity's moral

development.[26] The foundation of human rights is the inherent dignity of every person, which is first and foremost recognized and comprehended by reason. Human rights ultimately come from both humans and God rather than from the will of other human beings. These rights can be upheld collectively as well as individually since they are universal, unalienable, and inviolable. They include meeting humans' basic needs in the material and spiritual domains. The teachings of Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council, and Pope Paul VI have all provided significant indications of the notion of human rights, which is universality and indivisibility.**27** These include the right to life, the right to a loving family, the right to a moral environment that fosters the development of the child's individuality, and the right to one's own personal progress. From this perspective, human reproductive cloning would conceivable challenge some human rights, including a women's reproductive rights, the right to life, and the right of a child's individuality. The Bible declares that people are God's creations and that the thing that makes them unique and distinctive is that they are made in God's likeness and image. In this sense, human beings have the dignity of being individuals, capable of self-knowledge and self-possession, voluntarily offering themselves, and coming into communion with other human beings. God sets human beings at the center and apex of the created order, and through grace, human beings are required to enter into a relationship with the Creator.

Community and Diversity

The future of human cloning faces ethical, legal, and technological obstacles. Some contemplate that the prospect of recreating humans like great athletes or super-geniuses could be attractive if cloning of a human being were ever to be perfected. Yet, even if human cloning were to take place, many assert that nurture is just as significant as nature. While we can understand the development and evolution of human being genetically, including its origins and dispersal from Africa, this leads us only so far. Humans also live in socially structured groupings, and culture is a defining social characteristic of humans. It encompasses all of the products of the

human mind in general, including social and political structures, modes of operation, moral and religious norms, language, common sense, and scientific knowledge. Due to cultural inheritance – a uniquely human method of accomplishing environmental adaptation – culture evolution has taken over as the predominant process of human evolution. Humans have two different types of heredity: biological and cultural. Hence, human sexuality is a divine heritage of humanity. Only hereditary qualities may be passed on to the progeny under vertical heredity, which is the case in biology.

Cultural inheritance, is broader than biological inheritance. It enables methods of environmental adaptability unavailable to nonhuman animals. Therefore cultural adaptation has become more significant than biological adaptation throughout the history of humans. The Church has emphasized that the human person is an organic, harmonious reciprocal connection. The basis of human oneness is the spiritual and eternal soul, which was formed with the body in perfect harmony. Given that God created it, physical life is sacred. So human beings have two distinct qualities: they are metaphysical beings who are capable of transcendence, and they are material creatures that are physically connected to this physical planet.

The Church argues that the union of soul and body is so fundamental that one needs to regard the soul as the shape of the body. Human nature is built on relational subjectivity, and the human person is fundamentally a social creature. A society is a collection of people who are connected by the universal concept of unity. The human being is compelled to live in society from the very beginning and can only develop and fulfill his purpose in relationship with other people. Yet humans are also plagued by arrogance and selfishness and other forms of antisocial behavior. A healthy social plurality is necessary for the common benefit of all. So a part of the dignity of the human being from a religious perspective is the recognition of community and diversity which would become challenged by the genetic selection of traits used in human cloning.

Conclusion

The philosophical and theological discussions surrounding human cloning began in 1978. Since then, with the advances in cloning research the ethical debate is becoming more intense. From a theological perspective, the dignity of the human person is found in their eternal soul, in their community, and in harmonious reciprocal interaction. These are also attributes of human dignity recognized by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The best approach to dealing with the issue of cloning in the future is with reasonable legislation rather than impenetrable obstacles. We need to recognize theological approaches to the sacredness of the human individual while allowing the benefits of our technologies. Humanity's job in the twenty-first century is to figure out how to use cloning responsibly, because the structures we build now will shape the future. Even though it is important to support the freedom of scientific inquiry and discovery, there need to be legal limits which are coordinated with our religions and the principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While human cloning advanced medical technology will continue in the twenty-first century, there is a need for more integrated discussion involving both secular ethics and theological principles to create more awareness about the potential risks and benefits for humanity.

ENDNOTES

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