

Xeroxing the Soul? Theological and Ethical Responses to Human Cloning¹

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, the Bahamas-based cloning company Clonaid announced that it has successfully cloned a baby girl, Eve, who was allegedly born on 26 December 2002. This news sent a ripple of interesting and sometimes wild speculations about the philosophical, theological, ethical and legal implications of the first cloned human being, if indeed Clonaid's claim is to be believed. Before the reactions and responses to this first announcement had abated, Clonaid announced that it has successfully cloned another baby, this time to a Dutch lesbian couple, and subsequently, a third in Japan. The company has not been entirely forthcoming in presenting the alleged clones for DNA testing, and thus their claims have not been verified by an independent group of scientists. Given the origin and nature of the company, many scientists tend to dismiss the claims of Clonaid as an attempt to draw attention to itself. Clonaid was established by the Raelian cult whose founder and members believe that human beings are cloned by extra-terrestrials.

Irrespective, however, of the truth or falsehood of the claim by Clonaid, the fact remains that we have entered into a brave new world in which our biotechnology has enabled us to produce clones. This new age dawned upon the world with the cloning of Dolly the sheep, which was carried out successfully by Ian Wilmut of the Roslin Institute in Scotland in 1996. In this lecture I explore some of the theological and ethical implications of this brave new world of biotechnology, especially in regard to the cloning of a human being. I begin with the question, Why do we

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want to clone human beings in the first place? Why the fascination with cloning humans? and examine some of the so-called justifications for human cloning and provide philosophical and theological responses to them. I then delineate the theological and ethical objections to human cloning, and examine the theological and ethical implications of human cloning on the individual, the family and society. Finally, I examine the argument which is gaining currency in this debate, namely, that since it is impossible to prevent someone from cloning humans, it is better to legislate it rather than ban it totally. And I close by looking at two stories from Genesis regarding human responsibility and the boundaries of human achievement, and ask the question whether we have crossed the line with human cloning technology.

WHY THE NEED TO CLONE HUMANS?

To understand the ethical problems concerning cloning, we need to ask the question, Why do people want to clone human beings in the first place? What are the justifications for cloning a human being? Several reasons have been forwarded. Let us begin with what may be termed as the most naïve and unfounded justification for human cloning, but which is made popular by the media. Cloning is a fascinating idea for some because they think that by this process they are able to create duplications of certain people in history. This popular myth regarding cloning has been well perpetuated mainly by the media. One example is a 1997 *Time* magazine article which provocatively if naively asks: 'Can the Soul be Xeroxed?' Such language perpetuates the myth that by cloning humans, we may not just be copying the genotype but also the essence of the person's identity.

Movies like *The Boys from Brazil*, *Bladerunner*, *Multiplicity*, and more recently, *The 6th Day*, explore this myth. The discussion here centres on the prospects of creating multiple Mother Teresas and other notable public figures, even movie stars. Of course this way of understanding cloning is completely misguided. When an adult is cloned, an embryo is created, and not the adult itself. Although the child has the same genetic code as the adult whose clone it is, the child will grow up to be very different from that adult. This is because genes alone do not constitute a person. Other factors like the environment in which the child grows up are also very

important. In more technical terms we say that the phenotype is not synonymous with the genotype. Sadly such myths are not only perpetuated by the media but by scientists themselves. Some scientists, for instance, associate cloning with immortality. An example is the American scientist Richard Seed who was reported to have said that ‘God intended for man to become one with God ... Cloning and the reprogramming of DNA is the first serious step in becoming one with God’².

Although this popular but misinformed justification for human cloning cannot be taken seriously, there are other justifications that do demand our serious consideration and response. The first has to do with the argument based on *utility*. According to this perspective, a practise should be defended on the basis of its usefulness or benefit to humankind. As long as a particular practise promises to improve the human condition, increase the well being of certain human beings, it is justified. Therefore if cloning a human being will bring about improvement to the well-being of certain individuals or groups, then cloning should be allowed. While this argument has been used for therapeutic cloning – the cloning of human embryos for research – some have used it for reproductive cloning as well. Examples of such arguments are legion.

- Parents can replace a dead child with a genetically identical new child.
- Parents can produce the clone of a sick child in order to provide bone marrow or other bodily parts with minimal risk of rejection.
- Parents with a genetic predisposition to certain diseases or certain conditions can produce a child by cloning. To produce a child naturally will subject the child to the risk of developing a similar condition. Women carrying affected mitochondrial DNA are an example of this predicament. These women will pass these genetic defects to their children. Nuclear transfer technology may offer a way for these women to have children genetically related to them, but who will not inherit the genetic defects.
- For some infertile couples, cloning will allow the couple to have a child.

² D. Sapsted and R. Highfield, ‘Plea for Cash to Clone Humans’, *Daily Telegraph*, 8 January 1998, pp. 1-2.

Therefore some have asked, If cloning can bring about such benefits and others why ban it?

Along with the utility justification, there is also the *autonomy justification*. The autonomy justification basically maintains that perspectives to cloning are too diverse for any normative position to be adopted. This particular approach has become very popular especially in an individualistic culture where individual choices and values are based on the individual's experiences and perspective, and where the autonomy of the individual must be respected as a matter of principle. The autonomy justification can take on different forms and argued from different points of departure. From the standpoint of personal freedom, the autonomy justification simply asserts that people's freedom must be respected, and that such respect must mean that they must be allowed to make important life decisions for themselves. This standpoint of course recognises that decisions are not made in a vacuum, but are influenced by personal values, religious commitments and philosophical orientations. But the decisions must be respected, nonetheless, regardless of the philosophy that inspires them. The second point of departure is the view that reproductive choice is a private matter, and should not be the domain where social intrusion is allowed. The third front is the freedom of scientific inquiry. Here it is simply argued that high value must be placed in the freedom of scientific inquiry, which should be protected against draconian control. Any attempt by institutions or by the state to exert such control is deemed as anti-science and anti-progress.

THE UTILITY AND AUTONOMY ARGUMENTS EXAMINED

What are we to say about these justifications for human cloning? How is the Christian to respond to the utility and autonomy arguments for human cloning? Let us begin with the utility argument. There is no doubt that the utility argument is admirable in some respects. It is founded on certain humanitarian principles and has the benefit of society at large in mind. But although such an argument may be admirable in some respects, it nonetheless poses some serious problems, particularly in regard to the Christian understanding of what it means to be human. One of the dangers associated with the utility argument is that it assumes that it is able to anticipate the outcome of human cloning with some degree of precision

and accuracy. It assumes that we know exactly how human cloning will benefit society at large. In the case of cloning a child in order to ensure that he or she possesses a certain trait, the assumption according to the utility argument is that we can quantify accurately the satisfaction of the parents of that cloned child. But we delude ourselves if we think this. The fact is that it is impossible to anticipate, or even imagine, the long-term consequences of human cloning to our future.

Despite its humanitarian motivation, the utility argument in fact willy-nilly endorses a form of eugenics. It sanctions the notion that certain people can be used as mere means to achieve the ends of society. Thus despite its vision of the greater good, the utility argument actually urges the inhuman use of human beings. An example of this would be the creation of a large group of clones with low intelligence in order to provide society with a source of menial labour. Another example would be to clone humans in order to harvest body parts such as transplantable organs from them. Such inhuman use of humans should never be countenanced by any society. The utility argument appears on the one hand to be fascinated by the prospects of cloning and its potential benefit for the larger society. But on the other hand it is blind to the great costs that are incurred in obtaining these benefits. Society should never allow so-called humane ends to be achieved by inhumane means.

The utility argument opens the door to the frightening prospect of genetic engineering: the modification of the genes of persons without their consent – not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of society at large. To clone a human being with a certain genetic code because of the attractiveness or usefulness of a person with this code is the beginning of a much larger enterprise. A researcher with the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations, Arthur Dyck, has rightly pointed out that the success of mammalian cloning in Dolly is but a drop in a towering wave of genetic research that is about to descend upon us³. It opens the door to large-scale eugenics whose earlier instantiations in history we are all aware of. It is just that today, with current knowledge in genetics and the biotechnology at our disposal, the stakes are much higher.

Autonomy is also an insufficient basis for providing justification for human cloning. The autonomy argument is therefore intrinsically flawed. It maintains that individuals have the right and freedom to make

³ Arthur J. Dyck, 'Eugenics in Historical and Ethical Perspective', in *Genetic Ethics: Do the Ends Justify the Genes?* Ed. John Kilner et al (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 25-39.

important life choices for themselves. It celebrates freedom and rejects any attempt that would prevent the fullest expression of freedom. In the case of human cloning, it insists that the freedom of individuals as well as that of scientists must be respected. But showing that freedom will be curtailed cannot be sufficient argument for justifying a particular action. Ethical principles must be established on premises other than just autonomy. The history of the previous century has witnessed the atrocities of unfettered scientific experimentation on human beings. Documents like the Nuremberg Code, which state that scientific investigations should never be made when it results in the harm or destruction of human beings, express the conviction that is born out of horrendous experiences of atrocities that had been proliferated in the name of unbridled freedom in history.

Even if the autonomy argument is valid – and we are saying that it is not – the question, whose autonomy? whose good? must surely be addressed. What about the good of the human clone? In this regard, the autonomy justification is not very different from the utility justification in that both are founded upon a biased and limited view of the good. The utility argument focuses on the good of ‘society at large’ (which is itself a nebulous abstraction!) without considering the good of the human clone. The autonomy argument focuses on the freedom and the good of the individual or scientific community but again fails to take into consideration the freedom and the good of the human clone. As a consequence of this perspectival blind spot, both engage in some form of eugenics by treating some human beings as means to the mostly selfish ends of others. In both cases, the human clone is the silent and forgotten victim.

THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL OBJECTIONS TO CLONING

The Commodification of Human Beings

The Christian response to human cloning must not be limited only to the philosophical refutation of the justifications presented by its supporters. It must be based on what Scripture teaches. Needless to say, however, it is impossible to find direct references in the Bible that deal with somatic cell transfer or therapeutic and reproductive cloning. The Christian response must therefore be based on the implications of the broader theological

themes that have bearing on this issue. Here, the Christian response is formulated on the basis of the biblical understanding of the nature and dignity of the human being, the nature of human sociality, and the extent to which human dominion should be emphasised. According to the Bible, human beings are created in the image of God and should therefore be accorded with dignity and respect. What about the human clone? Is the clone a human being that should also enjoy the same dignity and respect? The human clone cannot be less than a human being that bears the image of God. This is true of all human beings regardless of whether they came into being through the natural process of procreation or through reproductive cloning. As a human being, the human clone must be accorded the respect and dignity due to every human being. The human clone enjoys the freedom that every human being enjoys. Made in God's image, the human clone has the capacity for spiritual communion with God like every human being.

It is for this very reason that the Christian cannot countenance human cloning, both therapeutic and reproductive. In therapeutic cloning, the human embryo is cloned in order that stem cells may be harvested from them or in order that research can be conducted on them. The embryos are destroyed and merely discarded in the process. This is an example of the commodification of human beings because human beings are treated as mere objects that can be used and then destroyed and discarded. The same argument is made against cloning a human being for the purpose of obtaining spare parts or transplantable organs from them. The Christian cannot support the utility justification, not just because it is intrinsically flawed, but also (and primarily) because it treats a human being as a means towards an end. Such approaches should never be countenanced, no matter how 'great' or 'noble' that end might be. Abigail Rian Evans of Princeton Theological Seminary explains:

This theological vision of our humanity, which includes our dignity and worth, demands that we each are seen inherently valuable. The dignity and worth of each person is grounded in the Christian teaching of the equality of all persons and reflected in the Kantian dictum to treat

persons as ends in themselves and not simply means to an end⁴.

This applies to cloning a child for whatever reason, be it to replace a deceased child or to obtain bone marrow for therapeutic purposes. The fundamental objection here is that such a practice treats the person as an object and therefore violates the dignity and the sanctity of human life.

Cloning and the Family

What are the implications of cloning on the family and on society? The Anglican theologian, Oliver O'Donovan, has argued that there should be a careful distinction between those whom we *beget* and those whom we *make*⁵. Those whom we beget are like ourselves and can be treated as our equals. But those whom we make are already estranged from us, alienated because of their origins, and therefore will be treated like objects. To put it in another way, there is a profound difference between a progeny and a product. The problem with human cloning is that it tends to introduce an element of making in the process of human begetting and procreation. Christian ethicists and theologians press this issue because of its potential to introduce such radical changes into the constitution of human society. Stanley Hauerwas, for instance, maintains that children must not be treated as products but as gifts that we must cherish. In his book, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics*, Hauerwas explains what this means:

[Children] are basic and perhaps the most essential gifts that we have because they teach us how to be. That is, they create in us the proper need to want to love and regard another. For love born of need is always manipulative love unless it is based on the regard of the other as an entity that is not in my control but who is all the more valuable because I do not control him. Children are gifts exactly

⁴ Abigail Rian Evans, 'Saying No to Human Cloning', in *Human Cloning: Religious Responses*, edited by Ronald Cole-Turner (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press), p. 29.

⁵ Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).

because they draw our love to them while refusing to be as we wish them to be⁶.

The first problem attending to human cloning, then, is that it is a form of control which will ultimately distort human relationship and society. A whole orientation is established in the process of natural procreation. Children conceived sexually are 'begotten not made'. In conceiving a child sexually, the man and the woman are affirming the next generation, the future of human society. They are affirming that child, regardless of how it turns out. Furthermore, the parents of the child are confessing the limits of their control over the child. The parents are in fact confessing that their child is not just 'their' child, and that the child does not exist simply for their happiness or sense of fulfilment. The child exists also for himself or herself – because the child has his or her own integrity and dignity as a person. In asexual reproduction or cloning, however, we seek to make children in our own images. In cloning we make a child in accordance to our will. This will result in the commodification of children and control over their genotypes. To return to what Hauerwas has so perceptively pointed out, such efforts will result in a radical and disastrous shift in attitude to children. Instead of receiving them as gifts who are welcomed and loved as they are, children are treated as mere means to ensure the happiness of adults. Brent Waters explains:

In coming to see children as the outcome of reproductive decisions the family is debased to a means of satisfying parental desires, so that belonging becomes conditional upon desirability of offspring whom parents choose to admit into their sphere of affection and attention. In this respect, selecting a desirable clone simply magnifies the most disturbing aspects of quality-control measures and collaborative reproduction, for it attempts to further subsume the element of chance into that of choice. For unlike quality-control measures and collaborative reproduction, which produce a unique genome and therefore an element of risk, cloning assures a specific genotype. Rather than enabling the family to be a place of

⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), p. 153.

unconditional belonging, cloning would only enforce a further constriction in which conditional belonging is offered within an increasingly narrow opening⁷.

The second problem with cloning humans has to do with the profound relationship between sexuality, identity and sociality. We may say that sexuality is the germ of our sociality⁸ – it introduces a certain kind of relationship to the world. Sexual reproduction is not about self-replication or self-preservation because in sexual reproduction we look beyond ourselves to another who will constitute the next generation. This is very different from cloning ourselves. With sexual reproduction, children are in some senses genetically dependant on their parents, and yet in some senses also independent of them. Children do not replicate either their father or their mother. They do not carry the genetic code of just one parent. They are related to their parents and yet different from their parents. In an important sense, children are independent of their parents.

Put differently, children who come about through sexual reproduction can never be seen as the continuation of their parents' projects. In a word, they have their own identities. And it is this independence that allows them to relate with their parents *as* parents. The problem with the clone is that the identity issue is clouded, and with it also the issue of relationship. How do we describe the identity of the clone? How are we to think of generations here? Genetically speaking, the clone will be the twin of his father or his mother, depending on whose genetic code he or she possesses. Genetically the cloned male would be the twin brother of his 'father', and the cloned female the twin sister of her 'mother'. So are they siblings then? Or are they parent and child? Genetics suggests one answer, age suggests another⁹. When writ large, the ramifications that this has on society as a whole is incalculable. In his testimony presented to the United States National Bioethics Advisory Committee on March 14, 1997, Professor Leon Kass maintained that

⁷ Brent Waters, 'One Flesh? Cloning, Procreation, and the Family' in *Human Cloning: Religious Responses*, edited by Ronald Cole-Turner (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press, 1997), p. 85.

⁸ Gilbert Meilaender, 'A Case Against Cloning', in *Beyond Cloning: Religion and the Remaking of Humanity*, edited by Ronald Cole-Turner (Pennsylvania: Trinity International Press, 2001), p. 79.

⁹ Meilaender, 'A Case Against Cloning', p. 80.

Genetic distinctiveness not only symbolises the uniqueness of each human life and the independence of its parents that each human child rightfully attains. It can also be an important support for living a worthy and dignified life. Such arguments apply with great force to any large-scale replication of human individuals. But they are, in my view, sufficient to rebut even the first attempts to clone a human being. One must never forget that these are human beings upon whom our eugenic or merely playful fantasies are to be enacted¹⁰.

CLONING AND THE ETHICS OF INEVITABILITY

Before we bring our discussion to a close, we must turn briefly to another justification for the legalisation of human reproductive cloning. The seed of this argument was planted when the fertility researcher, Panayiotis Zavos, declared before the U.S. Congress that ‘the development of human cloning is inevitable’. This pronouncement has led some to conclude that government policies and ethical decisions regarding cloning should align themselves to the fact that human cloning is inevitable. The argument goes like this: since human cloning cannot be stopped, since someone somewhere will be able to generate the funds and gather the scientists to clone a human being, it is better to legalise the practice and ensure that stringent regulations are in place to guide it. If human cloning continues to be banned, it will be driven underground, and this would make it very difficult to police. I shall call this argument the ethics of inevitability.

The problem with this argument is that it fails to take into consideration the weightier issues surrounding human cloning. The opponents of cloning are concerned about the integrity and dignity of the human being, the nature of the human family, and the future of human society. They are concerned about the commodification of human beings and the inhuman use of humans to achieve the goals of society. Those who advance the ethics of inevitability do not seem to be concerned about

¹⁰ Leon R. Kass, Testimony presented to the National Bioethics Advisory Committee, March 14, 1977, Washington, DC, <http://www.all.org/abac/clontxo4.htm>.

these larger issues and even appear to treat them as inconsequential. The question that must be asked is, Does the pronouncement of inevitability signify ethical finality? Should ethical decisions be made on the basis of the inevitable? The answer to these questions must surely be a resounding No. Just because a certain outcome is deemed to be inevitable does not warrant society to decide in its favour. Society should not be obligated simply to go along with the inevitable. This is not the way in which society generally deal with issues. For example, homicide, terrorism and the trafficking of controlled drugs may be said to be inevitable. But does this mean that these activities are blameless or ethically laudable? Most societies would have comprehensive laws against such activities despite the fact that they cannot be totally stopped.

The ethics of inevitability when applied to human cloning appears to be an expression of technological determinism and fatalism. It maintains that just because a certain technology is available, one should pursue it as a moral imperative – or at least allow it to be so pursued. Any attempt to prevent it from developing would be perceived as taking a stance that is ‘anti-science’ and ‘anti-progress’. But such logic surely undermines the very nature of ethical decisions. Ethical decisions are based on the distinction between ‘can’ and ‘ought’. Ethics emphasises the fact that human action must be directed not on the basis of ability but on the basis of morality. Ability alone cannot be the determiner of the course of human action. By diffusing the distinction between ‘can’ and ‘ought’, the ethics of inevitability transgresses the most fundamental principle of ethics.

In the final analysis, the ethics of inevitability is really not ethics at all, but a rejection of ethics, and an invitation to abandon ethics. The logic is slave to a technological determinism and fatalism and it subjects human decisions and actions to such slavery. Ethical criteria are simply collapsed into what is possible: we ought because we can. Such an approach is simplistic and dangerous. To choose this logic is to abandon ourselves to a form of scientific totalitarianism in which ethical choices are bent in the direction of the dictates of science and technology. Christian ethics can never embrace the logic of inevitability. Christian ethics is not based on that which is possible, but that which pleases and glorifies God. It is founded on divine revelation: the self-disclosure of God and the unveiling of the meaning of human existence.

CONCLUSION

In Genesis 2 we find a description of the creation of Adam and the Garden of Eden. In verse 15 we read: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it'. God places Adam in the Garden and gave him specific responsibilities. He is to work on the Garden and care for it. There is a subtle but brilliant interplay between of the tabernacle and Eden symbolism here. The sense here is that Adam serves God by taking care of the Garden just as the Levites would later serve God with their tabernacle duties. Both are stewards of God. Just as the Levite is the priest in God's tabernacle, so Adam is the priest of the creation. Thus just as the Levites in their duties should never assume the place of God, so Adam in taking care of the Garden is to do so without over-reaching himself and presuming himself to be the Lord of the creation. The command to 'rule over the animal kingdom' (Gen 1:28b) is not a license for the exploitation and subjugation of nature. Rather it is a commission to care for the creation in the way that mirrors the Creator's providential care.

In Genesis 11 we have a description of human beings attempting to over-reach themselves by building a tower to heaven, and to make a name for themselves. The Old Testament scholar von Rad wrote the following commentary on this passage:

... the city arises as a sign of their valiant self-reliance, the tower as a sign of their will to fame ... one will observe a subtlety of the narrative in the fact that it does not give anything unprecedented as the motive for this building, but rather something that lies within the realm of human possibility, namely, a combination of their energies on the one hand and on the other the winning of fame, i.e., a naïve desire to be great ... These are therefore the basic forces of what we call culture. But in them, in the penetrating judgement of our narrator, is rebellion against God, a concealed Titanism, or at least, as v. 6 will show, the first step in that direction¹¹.

¹¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*. Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1972), p. 149.

These two stories present a serious tension in our calling from God. On the one hand we are called to use our God-given skills to care for the created order, including ourselves. This is the mandate of stewardship that Genesis 2 describes. On the other hand, Genesis 11 reminds us of the great danger of over-reaching ourselves, and of assuming a role that belongs to God alone. This tension is inherent in every aspect of human culture, but it is particularly acute in the scientific enterprise. Human cloning and genetic technology pushes these issues to the very boundaries. A thin-line separates the stewardship of Genesis 2 and the titanism of Genesis 11. Does human cloning – if it were possible – cross that line? For reasons that I hope this lecture has made quite clear, I believe that it has.

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