

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLONING?

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Cloning scares the hell out of people, because the idea of cloning people scares the hell out of people. Some of this fear is well-founded. Like any new reproductive technology, the cloning of entire human organisms can be put to good or bad effect, for good or bad reasons. But much of the fear is not well-founded. Before you could say "Hello, Dolly," the U.S. administration moved to ban federal funding of human cloning research; and there is considerable support in Congress for an outright ban on the use of somatic cell nuclear transfer technology for the purpose of human cloning. Why? Here is part of Clinton's statement announcing the funding ban:

Each human life is unique, born of a miracle that reaches beyond laboratory science. I believe we must respect this profound gift and resist the temptation to replicate ourselves.¹

This powerful rhetoric captures two very common intuitions concerning the putative wrongness of human cloning. First is the idea that something of ethical importance, present in normal procreation, must be missing in the cloning procedure or its product. Second is the description of cloning as "replication" rather than "reproduction," with the implication that cloning is a threat to uniqueness. I think both of these common intuitions are entirely groundless, no matter what one's metaphysical starting point.

I. In search of the missing ingredient

Clinton makes an implicit appeal to God. So it might be thought that God's approval is the missing ingredient: He gave us the gift of sexual reproduction, and does not approve of alternatives. This claim is interesting if it is true, but (as is always the case where God's approval is concerned), the best way for God-fearers to discover whether it is true is by seeking independent grounds for whether or not human cloning is unethical. We certainly have no evidence that God generally disapproves of alternatives (e.g. bicycles) to his more direct gifts (e.g. legs). So such claims cannot reasonably be used to argue for the wrongness of cloning.

Another God-given candidate for the missing ingredient might be the *soul*. It might then be supposed that clones will be something less than fully-fledged persons. This is a very serious error, and if many are tempted to make it, we are in much more trouble than Dolly can bring us. Whatever one's favoured view of persons--whether one equates persons with human animals, or continuing unbranching psychologies, or God-given souls, or virtual machines, or whatever--developed, functioning clones have a claim to personhood equal to that of any normal human individual produced by sexual reproduction.

This is a point on which the fans of human cloning tend to be as misguided as the opponents. For instance, Alasdair Palmer writes:

Cloning demonstrates that it is possible to produce a child from every cell in your body. Every cell is a potential person: the molecules that make it up need only be placed in the right conditions, "fooled" appropriately, and wham!--the process of creating a new human life begins. No sex, no mystery, just a sequence of chemical reactions. And where is the soul in that? Nowhere.²

¹ Reported in *The Washington Post*, March 5, 1997, A10.

² Alisdair Plamer, "Comment," *The Sunday Telegraph*, January 11, 1998.

But this is an unwarranted conclusion, at least for those who believe in God-given souls, since they manage to retain this belief when confronted with the biological facts of ordinary reproduction. Why should they believe differently about the products of human cloning? It would be remarkable if a believer in souls held that a child who is the result of asexual reproduction somehow failed to acquire one. What possible evidence could be adduced for this conclusion? And how is the contrary evidence--namely the walking and talking and whatnot, that the clone exhibits--to be explained away? It will not do to appeal to a natural/artificial distinction, since there is no reason to think God cannot work *through* us. There is in the world today somewhere in the order of 100,000 human beings who are the result of artificial reproductive procedures like IVF. Surely no one seriously holds that *I* have a soul, but that these "artificial" children do not. Suffice it to say that if human cloning goes ahead, and fully developed clones are not accorded the respectful treatment due to persons generally, then God, if there is one, will be rather displeased with us, and rightly so.

II. *Reproduction or replication?*

The belief that cloning is replication--a word with pejorative connotation in this context--is rooted in two sorts of misunderstanding. The first is a simple scientific misunderstanding: many people apparently think that human clones will be not only genetically but physically and psychologically identical with the donor. This raises two unpleasant prospects: the loss of personal individuality and identity; and the production of legions of like-minded, and easily controllable, minions. But clone and donor will in fact be less alike than ordinary identical twins. They will be the products of substantially different environments, before and after birth. Of course genes matter, but to suppose that they are somehow even close to the whole story of a person is to fall into the mistakes of either genetic determinism or Lamarckianism.

Suppose that I had been cloned twenty years ago, at the age of 21. Looking at my 20-year-old progeny--call him "Robert,"--is not like looking in a mirror. It's probably more like looking at an old photograph, except that *I* didn't have green hair and a pierced nose. Robert thinks I'm a boring old blowhard, but it could be worse, and Hey--you can't choose your family. Robert disagrees with much of what I stand for, criticizes many of the choices I've made, and yet increasingly sees much of me in him. One day, he might even think that if he turns out a lot like me, then that's not such a bad thing. And I might well wish that he was more like me than he is. If Robert sounds like a typical contemporary 20-year-old, that's precisely the point.

The second source of fear is a constellation of philosophical misunderstandings. It might be supposed that human cloning presents a threat to personal identity, to individual uniqueness. But even were the genetic determinists or Lamarckians correct, and the clone were physically and psychologically identical to the donor, still the result would be a numerically distinct person from the donor. This is logically guaranteed. Cloning is certainly not *token* replication of a person. But perhaps this obvious point fails to address the real concern. Perhaps the intuition is that it's a bad thing to have another person qualitatively identical with you to a greater degree than is usual. So it is better if there is no one around who is genetically identical with you. This is an objection on the ground that cloning is *type* replication.

But no good reason is ever offered for the supposition that qualitative identity between persons is bad or undesirable, and there seem to be several pieces of contrary evidence. Most of us, honestly, would prefer that the world contained *more* people who are psychologically like us rather than fewer. To the extent that genetic similarity is reflected in psychological similarity, cloning would tend to satisfy this preference. Moreover, the experience of identical twins hardly suggests that genetic uniqueness is something they pine for. I am not a twin. But when I imagine the prospect of discovering that I have a long-lost identical twin, I find the prospect

attractive rather than threatening (though of course, I might have *other* reasons for being upset--not being told earlier, for instance). I doubt that I am alone in this.

Consider also that having genetic offspring is ordinarily so important to us. It's not that we cannot value children who are adopted, or are the result of genetic donation by others. Rather, it's that, given the choice, most (if not all) of us prefer to have children who carry our genetic material. It's *prima facie* implausible, then, that having offspring with one's entire genetic complement is in this respect at all worse than the usual arrangement. If anything, from the purely selfish perspective it seems better.

So, being a clone donor is not an intrinsically bad thing--it seems an awful lot like being a parent. And being a clone is not an intrinsically bad thing--it's a lot like being a child. If clones are treated as special in a bad way--unlike identical twins, who are generally treated as special in a good way--then that reflects poorly on us, not upon the fact that they are clones. Cloning is yet another means of artificial reproduction; the claim that it is replication is ungrounded in either metaphysics or axiology.

Indeed, my deep suspicion is that the fear of cloning, perceived as replication, often has nothing in particular to do with the loss of uniqueness. Rather, the idea of human clones conjures up images of vast armies, all thinking and acting alike, all subject to domination by an iron will. To repeat, genetic determinism is false. Clones are no more likely to be turned into brainwashed armies than we non-clones are (sadly, they will be no less likely to, either). Clones are no more or less likely to lack autonomy.

Curiously, some arguments with genetic determinist overtones suggest that human enhancement through cloning is a bad thing. George F. Will asks:

Suppose a cloned Michael Jordan, age 8, preferred the violin to basketball? Is it imaginable?... Imagine the emotional distress of a cloned person with foreknowledge of powerful genetic predispositions, psychological or biological.³

The fact is that many sexually produced children are subject to just these sorts of pressures. Many top-flight athletes have children with other top-flight athletes; academics with other academics; and so on. And many children are subject to the pressure of great expectation, even when there is no particular genetic reason to suppose they will excel. Once again, there seems in this respect nothing special about the products of human cloning.

Are there some cases in which it is better not to be a clone? Here we must be careful. There will be no cases in which it would be rational for someone who isn't a clone to wish that he were. But by the same token, there will be no cases in which it is rational for a clone to wish that she were not a clone. This is so simply because the possible product of sexual union between the parents (a possible non-clone), and a possible clone of one of them, have only 50% of their genetic material in common. They are clearly numerically distinct possible persons. So a clone cannot rationally wish to be his merely possible sibling any more than he can rationally wish to be his mother.

But it might be rational for a clone to wish that he had never been born; in just the same sort of circumstances in which it is rational for a non-clone to wish she had never been born. More interestingly, in some cases it will be better that parents have a sexually reproduced child rather than a particular clone; but in others it will be better that parents have a particular clone instead of a sexually reproduced child. For instance, if one of the parents has a serious genetic disease,

³ George F. Will, "The Moral Hazards of Scientific Wonders," *The Washington Post*, February 26, 1997, A19.

such as Huntington's, cloning the other parent may well be a better option than gambling on the luck of the genetic draw.

Human cloning may be done for good reasons, or for bad reasons; and have good and bad consequences. But any wrongness in it attaches to the reasons, or to the consequences, and not to the process itself. Of course there are ethical issues surrounding human cloning, but they are more of the same. It may be that human cloning is too risky, or too expensive, to be justified. Or it may be pursued in a way which disrespects persons--either the donor or the clone. But there is nothing intrinsic to human cloning which justifies the repugnance which many feel toward it.

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