

Human Cloning

Why Cloning Threatens Human Dignity and Human Rights

The beginning of a new member of the human species occurs when a one-cell embryo is produced from the fusion of sperm and ovum. Human cloning produces an embryo by fusing the nucleus of a body cell with an enucleated ovum. A new zygote (single-cell human being) is formed by this process, and that young human being will be a near genetic copy of the body cell donor.

As soon as a human individual exists, he or she has rights and interests relating to his or her own future - however long or short that future may be. Embryos have an interest in survival and protection from attack, just like any human being.

Human beings are valuable in themselves, simply as human beings. We have dignity in virtue of what we are, not what we do. To see human beings as having dignity only on the basis of current functional abilities - abilities we arbitrarily select - is to fail to recognise that human rights are intrinsic to the individual. The notion of human rights makes no sense without the notion that each of us has dignity in virtue of what we are.

To deliberately produce a human being with the express intention of destroying that same human being is, therefore, totally unethical. Moreover, to make a human being the product of technological manufacture is to treat that human being in a way that already demeans him/her. The manufacture of human beings encourages people to treat those human beings as less than human, as can be seen in the fact that thousands are killed or otherwise abused every day in IVF clinics around the world.

Problems with Therapeutic and Reproductive Cloning

With so-called “therapeutic” cloning, embryos are killed by extracting their cells when they are 5-7 days old. With so-called “reproductive” cloning, embryos are, in theory at least, transferred to a woman's body, gestated and brought to birth. The British Government proudly proclaims that it has outlawed “reproductive” cloning - i.e., the transfer of clone embryos. However, it is not the transfer but the creation of clones which should be outlawed as degrading to human beings. Interestingly, Dolly's creator, Ian Wilmut, now supports not only destructive but live-birth human cloning in principle, despite his doubts about the latter just a few years ago. Perhaps he should ponder his own words at the time: “It does not follow, just because we grow used to some phenomenon or other, that that phenomenon is good. We grow used to bad things, as well as to good.”

Problems with Cloning and Embryonic Stem Cells

The justification put forward for destructive/experimental cloning is that by destroying cloned embryos we will obtain embryonic stem cells for use in treating those with conditions such as Parkinson's. This claim is not even sustained by the scientific community at large. The New Scientist, for example, comments: “Will tailor-made,

cloned stem cells be needed for treating Parkinson's? Almost certainly not: of all the body's organs, the brain is the least likely to reject imperfectly matched tissues." But most importantly, even if this research were likely to succeed, how can we justify the wilful destruction of one human life in an attempt to save another?

Our Life-Affirming Position

We welcome the development of ethically acceptable treatments for conditions such as Parkinson's, and are greatly encouraged by research on adult stem cells, which can be extracted without killing anyone, have already produced successful treatments for a range of conditions, and have none of the potential tumour-forming problems that are inherent to embryonic stem cells.

The Law on Cloning

Therapeutic cloning is governed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. The Act was amended by Parliament in January 2001 to include cloning research.

In the UK, researchers are allowed to use eggs left over from IVF treatment programmes to create cloned human embryos for embryonic stem cell research. They do this using *reproductive cloning* techniques. The UK permits this provided the embryo is not allowed to develop for longer than 14 days.