Cloning

What Is Cloning?

A form of reproduction in which offspring result not from chance union of egg and sperm but from deliberate replication of the genetic makeup of another person.

This and other definitions modified from The President’s Council on Bioethics, Human Cloning and Human Dignity: An Ethical Inquiry, 2002. <www.bioethics.gov/reports/cloningreport/fullreport>

How Is It Done?

The nuclear material (containing the DNA) of any cell from a person to be cloned, the donor, is put into an oocyte (egg) which has had its nuclear removed.

So the result is genetically virtually identical to the donor.

Result is a cloned human embryo, which may or may not be implanted in a woman’s woman to develop into a child.
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Kinds of Cloning

• Cloning-to-produce-children ("reproductive cloning"): The cloned human embryo is formed for the purpose of implanting in a woman’s womb to initiate pregnancy.

• Cloning-for-biomedical-research ("therapeutic cloning"): The cloned human embryo is used for research or to extract stem cells for purpose of gaining knowledge and developing cures for human diseases.

Cloning-to Produce Children:
Issues to Consider

• Arguments in favor of cloning

• Arguments against cloning

• How much weight should we give to popular “repugnance”?

• Even if arguments against the (ethical) desirability of cloning are stronger, are they strong enough to ban the practice?

• Are they strong enough to ban research?

Arguments for Cloning

• People have a right to reproductive freedom.

• People may want cloning in some situations
  – Infertile couple
  – Couple who are carriers of genetic defect.
  – Cloning avoids need to involve third party or take risk with prenatal testing and possible abortion.
  – Child needs bone marrow transplant. Can create clone as organ donor
  – “Duplicate” a child who dies

• We could duplicate people with great talent.

• Educational benefits
Kass’s Repugnance

- Beyond rational argument, we learn from repugnance: “shallow are those who have forgotten how to shudder.”
- Mackin: “Intuition has never been a reliable epistemological method, especially since people notoriously disagree in their moral intuitions...If objections to cloning can identify no greater harm that a supposed affront to the dignity of the human species, that is a flimsy basis on which to erect barriers to scientific research and its applications.” (NBAC in earlier edition of Munson, p. 719)

Repugnance

- The wrongness and horror of some things are beyond rational articulation; e.g., father-daughter incest, rape
- “Shallow are the souls that have forgotten how to shudder”: a virtue ethics argument

Arguments Against Cloning

- An experiment now that could create dangerous mutations, harming the child
- The right to reproductive freedom doesn’t include a right to decide what kind of children to have.
- More than that, it violates a child’s right to an “open identity.”
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Dangerous Experiment?
• Dangers to cloned humans now (based on experience with animals) leads most to oppose doing it with our current knowledge.
• Question: should we oppose it in principle or “at this time” (NBAC) and leave the possibility open?

Further Arguments for/against
• We already have identical twins
  – But this is different. A clone could see how his/her “clone” lived life if much older.
• It doesn’t deny open future because people are not genetically determined
  – But people might feel that it does, and that itself is a psychological harm.
  – Those who did the cloning would have expectations the cloned person would unfairly be expected to meet.

Kass: Perversities of Cloning
• Changes begetting into making; here we manufacture human beings as man-made things.
• Cloning “denies the procreative teleology of sexuality itself.”
• “Excess of human will
• The creator stands above the created thing; “profoundly dehumanizing no matter how good the product.
• Changes the whole way we look at children, no longer to be loved unconditionally.
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Strong: Argument for Cloning

- Assuming it becomes as safe as other forms of reproduction, cloning to help a couple have a genetically related child they could not otherwise create is morally acceptable.
- Conditioned on finding no greater degree of birth defects in cloned children.
- Doesn’t address cloning for other reasons.

Procreative Freedom

- Must weigh value of procreative freedom against any objections to cloning
- Cloning does many of the same things as traditional reproduction.
  - Genetic connection of parent and child
  - Gestation (regular pregnancy)
  - Child is raised and loved by couple
  - Purpose is to create a family
- Doesn’t address gay couple or single person

Is Having Genetically Related Children Important or Just Vanity

- Creating a being with self-consciousness
- Affirmation of a couple’s love

Both of these can be fulfilled by cloning
Cloning

Response to Objections

- Objection: Harm to child – expectation to be liked the original person
- Response: genetics alone don’t make a person, and education can teach this
- Objection: other social harms
- Response: Consequentialist must consider both benefits and harms. Cloning gives child a life it wouldn’t otherwise have.
- Evaluation: Consequentialist requires best possible balance of benefits over harms.
- If just benefits over harms, then creation of any life not worse than death is a benefit

Response to Objections

- Deontological (e.g., Kantian): doesn’t treat child with respect
- Response: no reason to think this. Vagueness of the standard
- Teleological objection: violates the essence humans are meant to fulfill
- Response: “Teleological views have been displaced by our scientific understanding of the world.” p. 447
- Evaluation: !?

What Social Policy to Adopt?

- Even if ethically problematic, not itself an argument for banning.
- Should we enact a permanent ban?
- What about other countries? Would need an international ban?
- If impossible, should we ban the research right now?
- What about cloning-for-research?