



FACE...

Human Cloning: Is Cloneliness Next to Godliness?

TED PETERS

*Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
Berkeley, California*

THE SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENT OF CLONING IS THIS: THE DNA NUCLEUS OF AN already differentiated cell can now be reversed to its pre-differentiated state, making it possible to take an adult cell and make a baby from it. In the words of Ian Wilmut, the Scottish geneticist who cloned Dolly, "The fact that a lamb was derived from an adult cell confirms that differentiation of that cell did not involve the irreversible modification of genetic material required for development to term."¹ Many scientists had predicted it couldn't be done. Now it has.

Should we clone human beings? The thought makes many of us yell, "Yuk!" But, does the yuk factor provide enough theological ground for an ethical judgment or public policy? Does reactive hysteria warrant a moral argument? I think not. We need a more careful analysis of the science and the relevant theology.

Having said this, I do not want to be placed in a pro-cloning camp. I support proposals to ban temporarily such cloning experimentation. We need to give our culture and its ethical leaders time to sort out the issues and to formulate policies that will keep one principle clearly paramount: babies brought into the world by cloning or by any similar reproductive high tech must be treated with dignity—that is, cloned children must be loved and revered as ends in themselves and not commodified.

The theological argument I oppose goes like this: God wills that each of us should have a unique set of genes; therefore, cloning would violate God's will. Both politicians and theologians make this argument: The White House theologian, Bill Clinton, said we should not "replicate" ourselves, because to do so would be "playing God." In a February 25, 1997, press release, Donald Bruce, director of the Society, Religion, and Technology Project of the Church of Scotland, said that cloning human beings would be "ethically unacceptable as a matter of principle." Accord-

¹I. Wilmut, A. E. Schnieke, J. McWhir, A. J. Kind, and K. H. S. Campbell, "Viable offspring derived from fetal and adult mammalian cells," *Nature* 385 (February 27, 1997) 810-813.

(continued on p. 94)

TED PETERS is a professor of systematic theology and a research scholar at the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences at the Graduate Theological Union. He is author of Playing God? Genetic Determinism and Human Freedom (Routledge 1997).

TO FACE

Human Cloning: Why Say No?

REBEKAH MILES

*Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas*

ACCORDING TO TED PETERS, MANY CHRISTIANS ARE CAUGHT UP IN “CLONING Shock,” where “outrage rages” and good sense falters. Peters not only criticizes the opponents of human cloning, but also argues that no good theological reason for proscribing human cloning can be mustered. Though he enumerates temporary, pragmatic hurdles (high rates of miscarriage, social concern for the children produced), he also insists, “No, there are no abstract arguments I can think of that should prohibit cloning.” Or, “It seems to me that in principle, no theological objection should exist to proscribe categorically human cloning.” In short, Peters charges that the widespread religious opposition to human cloning is an example not of theological reasoning at its best but of a fearful, reactionary response at its worst.¹

If Peters wants to take on those who have opposed human cloning on theological grounds, he has a wide field from which to choose. Many denominational statements, for example, oppose human cloning. The United Methodist Genetic Science Task Force bases their call for a ban on human cloning in a theology of God’s creation and human stewardship. The trustees of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention support an international ban on cloning because of their affirmation of the “sanctity and uniqueness of human life.” The United Church of Christ Committee on Genetics uplifts “a concern for justice” as the basis for their opposition. These denominational positions, as well as statements from many theologians and religious ethicists, have raised a few recurring questions.²

- Will human cloning compromise our God-given human uniqueness or distinctiveness?

¹See, for example, Ted Peters, “Cloning Shock: A Theological Reaction,” in *Human Cloning: Religious Responses*, ed. Ron Cole-Turner (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997) 12-24, and an editorial by Peters in *dialog* 36/3 (1997) 162-63.

²Denominational statements on human cloning are available through the various church bodies and are also found in the appendix of *Human Cloning: Religious Responses*, 137-51.

(continued on p. 95)

REBEKAH MILES, associate professor of Christian ethics at Brite Divinity School, is a United Methodist clergyperson and a member of the United Methodist Genetic Science Task Force.

ing to Christian belief, he said, cloning would be a “violation of the uniqueness of human life, which God has given to each of us and to no one else.”²

What does a close look at this argument show? It shows that it relies on three doubtful assumptions. The first is that in order for a human person to have an individual identity he or she must have a unique genome, a unique set of genes. The second is that God has ordained that each person have a genome that differs from every other person’s. And the third is that through this genetic technology we human beings could accidentally produce two persons with the same identity and, thereby, violate the divine creator’s intention.

The first assumption is empirically false. What distinguishes a clone is that he or she would have the same genome as the person from whom the DNA was originally taken. Both the original DNA donor and the clone would have identical genotypes. But, does this mean they would have identical phenotypes—that is, would their bodies be exactly the same? No, not necessarily. DNA does not always express itself in lock step fashion. There are variations in expression; and spontaneous mutations occur. In addition, environmental factors are frequently decisive—that is, food, exercise, health care, and countless other environmental factors influence gene activity. If the DNA donor and clone are reared a generation apart in time, let alone in separate locations, similarities will be noticeable, to be sure, but differences will abound.

That’s the science. What about the theology? No reputable theological position, for example, has ever held that two twins share a single soul. Each has his or her own soul, his or her own connection to God. The human soul, theologically speaking, is not formed from DNA as the phenotype is formed from the genotype. The soul is not a metaphysical appendage to the physical. To the question once asked by *Time* magazine, “Can souls be xeroxed?” we might answer: no. Or, perhaps we might answer: if yes, then the result is two souls, not one.

The key to understanding the soul theologically is not its emergence beyond the physical as psyche or mind. Rather, the key is understanding the soul in terms of our relationship to God. The unique relation of a person to God is not determined by DNA. It is determined by God’s active grace, by God’s desire to love us as we are.

It would seem to me that no sound theological argument against cloning could be raised on the grounds that it violates an alleged God-given identity. Our identities in society come from growing up in society. Our identities before God come from God’s ongoing grace and from our desire or lack of desire to live in close communion with God. Souls do not come in any final form with our DNA. ⊕

²“Cloning Animals—A Suitable Case for Concern,” *Glasgow Herald* (February 25, 1997).

- How might human cloning be misused by sinful humans to further their selfish ends and objectify other people?
- Is a desire to replicate one's genetic inheritance in a human clone an attempt to deny our inevitable finitude as human beings?
- Will human cloning further social injustice by aggravating discrimination against those who are less than "perfect" and by limiting access to new technologies only to the wealthy? Moreover, what difference does it make if market forces drive the direction of the research?
- When does human alteration of creation go so far as to become a violation of God's creation? What is the difference between our human capacities for creation and God's?

Among the numerous arguments against human cloning, one of the most compelling centers around the nature of parenthood and the creation of new human life. Human cloning would bring monumental changes in our understanding of family and of parenthood. Under ordinary circumstances, the outcome of human reproduction is unpredictable. In a kind of reproductive potluck, parents do not know exactly what they will get in the end. With human cloning, parents would know the specific genetic inheritance of the expected child. More significant, they would consciously determine it. They would decide to reproduce a specific set of characteristics of a particular existing person. This is a fundamental change in the relationship between parent and child. As several ethicists have noted, human reproduction by cloning becomes more like making, manufacturing, or creating an artifact than the extraordinary mystery found in creation by the normal reproductive process. Instead of welcoming a unique creature as a gift of God, parents would pre-determine a desired outcome that is a near replication of an already existing genetic form.

This is no small matter for me these days. My husband and I are overdue with our first child. The anticipation of this wonderful and strange new life has reshaped our view of the ethics of human cloning. Throughout the pregnancy, my husband and I have remembered the words of the psalmist:

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb....My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. (Ps 139: 13ff. NRSV)

As people of faith, we believe that God has formed and knows our child, that God's eyes have "beheld [her] unformed substance." We recognize that although we had a hand in the initiation of this new life, we did not and could not set out to pre-determine the genetic structure. We could not decide precisely what genes we wanted for our child. God may know, but we do not. God may intentionally create a specific human life, but our place is simply to welcome the new life as gift. ⊕