

Human Cloning: An Aberration of Man's Propensity to Play God

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There seems to be no stop to the raging questions about cloning. Some of them pose a disturbing challenge to the inner core of our moral beliefs about man. Do clones have souls? Exactly when do they get these souls? If clones behave exactly as we do, and we premise that it is not philosophically nor theologically tenable that they can have one, will this not put into doubt the very existence of our own souls? It is this firm adherence to the existence of soul that makes a colleague of mine believe that cloning is untenable. If anything may be accomplished by the procedure, we can call the product by any name, except human being. His argument is simple: the human soul is spiritual and what is spiritual cannot be induced from something that is material. The only way that man can receive the soul is by infusion by God. And God, according to him, would not collaborate in that highly anomalous act which only betrays man's selfish desire to replicate his own kind. His skepticism on the issue of cloning typifies the opinions of those who sneer at the idea that the technique applied to animals can ever be employed to human beings. But, of course, there are those who think otherwise. Richard Seed, a physicist and now a controversial figure in United States because of his public announcement to clone human beings, even goes so far as to say that cloning is the "first step in becoming one with God." Others, indeed, wonder why not. God "sometimes writes through crooked lines" or that "He may permit an evil to take its course to remind the human being of his propensity to play God, and to teach him a lesson through the bitter consequence that it entails." What those consequences are in the case of human cloning, we can only speculate. Wild speculations, however, may lead to what is insane and ridiculous, as what has already been anticipated as the

possibility of cloning Jesus in this statement accidentally surfed in the internet: "Thanks to the advances of science, we can now take DNA samples from the shroud of Turin and clone Jesus for anyone who wants one. No more communicating with God through your pastor or priest. If you have a question for God you could just call home and ask him. Why, any woman who may want to could immaculately conceive Jesus... Just imagine a world with Jesus in every household!" What a good news to women who have secrets desires to be "Our Ladies of Immaculate Conception"! Nightmares have only started.

Breaking the Silence on Cloning

Instinctively, there was a chorus of protests when another technological breakthrough literally broke the silence that surrounded the making of Dolly, the sheep who has been cloned from a six-year old ewe. The creators? The embryologist Ian Wilmut and his colleagues of the Roslin Institute near Edininburgh, Scotland. The procedure appears simple: A cell taken from the breast of a ewe, and an egg cell taken from another ewe and emptied of its nucleus and DNA are placed next to each other where an electric pulse causes them to fuse together to start a cell division. The resulting embryo is then implanted in another ewe which, after a gestation period, gave birth to a baby lamb which is genetically identical to the original donor. This breakthrough opens the door of reproductive technology to many possibilities: both good and bad. We could already imagine people intensely hoping to create a reserve of therapeutic cells that would increase their chance of being cured with various diseases like cancer, degenerative disorders and inflammatory diseases. One apparent benefit derived from cloning is the very recent claim by the Boston researches that by successfully creating two identical, genetically engineered cows named George and Charlie, they could mass-produce drugs for humans in cows' milk. And yet, many voices generally sound the alarm of the potential evil that it may entail if the technique is used for human beings for various purposes: producing clones for spare parts, as replacements for dead children; producing an army of clones of evil men, producing our twins to propagate our own identities. Those voices echo from various directions, and thankfully, many listen and want to listen more.

In this assembly, I shall articulate the voice of the theologians regarding the moral implication of the issue on cloning. Although I may not be in the position to define the official teaching of the Church,

I shall develop my argument in line with the Church's stand on a more general issue on reproductive technology without, however, closing the door to the reflections distinctively Protestant which richness I cannot simply ignore. There is nothing fully explicit in Scripture nor in the Church's tradition as far as the morality of cloning is concerned, but in a recent document, the Church has made a passing, albeit striking, statement when it said that "attempts or hypothesis for obtaining a human being without any connection with sexuality through 'twin fission', cloning or parthenogenesis are to be considered contrary to the moral law since they are in opposition to the dignity both of human procreation and of conjugal union" (SCDF, 1987). This statement was made when the issue of IV-F was the hottest craze among the theologians and ethicists. Cloning was then a distant possibility, but the principles it had laid down must have been providentially pronounced to avert any attempt of human genius to cross the barriers of what it can do.

God's Design for Human Procreation

The biblical basis of the ethical argument on human cloning is found in the very popular passage that gives light to the foundation of man's dignity: "God created man in the image of Himself, in the image of God He created him, male and female he created them" (Gen.1:27). The truths revealed are ennobling: human beings were created by a very special act of God, and what makes it special is that, male and female were created in God's likeness. We carry not only the divine imprint or vestige, but also the image of the Personal God. And these "images" are propagated in a manner designed by God to transcend its purely biological dimension. This divinely designed human act refers to the familiar sexual embrace between male and female. Now, that sexual act is not just a copulation common to lower animals, but an act that is inherently "loving" and "procreational." It is through this act that male and female become "procreators" of God. In a concrete way, male and female respond to God's call of stewardship: "Be fruitful. Multiply, fill the earth and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth" (Gen.1:28). It is a call for man to have "dominion" over all creatures — a dominion, however, that is not absolute. It is a delegated one with limits and accountability to God (Moraczewski, 1997). The better term is stewardship because it connotes power and responsibility — correlative terms that set the

demarcation line between what humans, by the exercise of their freedom, can venture into and what they cannot, the transgression of which would inevitably result to destruction and death (Gen. 2:16-17). It is this stewardship that best captures man's jurisdiction over his life and the process through which it is brought forth. The generative process is one domain we attribute to the Creator and, therefore, we instinctively leave a space where He puts His creative hand to complete the masterful work of begetting another human person.

One of the disturbing facts about cloning is that it can be achieved outside the sexual act and, more significantly, without the contribution of the male and female gametes; therefore, it is an asexual reproduction. The idea of denying the sexual dimension of generation within marriage was already conceived even during the early Christian epoch. For instance, there was on the part of the Fathers of the Church – among them Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, John Damascene and even Jerome – a temptation to think that God really wanted human beings to reproduce in an asexual way or as the angels did, but foreseeing the sin of Adam and Eve, God providentially equipped them with reproductive organs which would be used after the fall (Dwyer, 1987). This opinion came about only because of their belief that the sexual impulse was the result of the original sin, as occasioned by Roman and Greek sexual promiscuity committed during that time. But this teaching did not prosper not only for its lack of Scriptural basis but also for its ludicrousness.

What had taken roots in the Christian tradition is the understanding that there is a deep connection between the sexual differentiation of male and female (expressed in the sexual relationship within marriage) and procreation. In other words, the sexual dimension is not only accidental to human procreation, it is in its essence. St. Augustine already sounded off his stand regarding the role of sexual act in the generation of children, although he could not hide his bias against it: "I do not see what could prevent there having an honorable marriage and an immaculate marriage bed in Paradise. God could have arranged that, without any restless burning sexual desire...children would be born." It was an affirmation to the sexual marital embrace without, however, the sexual impulse which Augustine was apparently advocating. In other words, the idea of an asexual human generation never gained serious consideration in Christian reflection. On the contrary, there developed a firm theological opinion regarding the nor-

mative value of the connection between the sexual act and procreation. It is the sexual act within marriage that ensures the dignity of the offspring. Any attempt to sever the connection and to generate a child outside the generative act is an affront to the dignity not only of the marital act itself, but also of the child himself. The possibility of cloning is very striking because it breaks this connection emphatically and, in so doing, tampers radically what basically endows dignity and equality to the child that is generated. But we ask further why precisely should procreation have to be tied up always with the sexual marital act? What is in the marital act that makes it the only setting worthy of procreation?

The Only Setting Worthy of Procreation

It has been traditionally maintained that the marital act in its natural setting is a divine design and therefore, has the normative moral significance. Pius XII considered the act as morally significant only when there is an interplay among the three elements: 1) the physical sexual act (organic); 2) the emotional elements of the union, and; 3) the spiritual elements (the love which is expressed in the act). It is the unity of these elements that the union of sperm and ovum become humanly meaningful. Johnson grouped these elements into three values: a) love values: where the significant feature is the integrity of the marital, interpersonal, parental love; b) bodily values: where the issue would be the integrity of the bodily processes and actions involved; and c) dignity values where the concern would be the personal dignity of husband and wife, and the child. These values are interactive. The love values and the bodily values should be tied up with each other, otherwise the dignity values, especially that of the child will be imperiled.

Recent reflections, following these lines of thought, see the act as the only worthy setting of procreation because it is the only act, among the loving acts of marriage, which embodies a love that is specifically marital because it is not only love-giving but also life giving (May, 1994). It is through this act that we can consider the child as the fruit of the love of husband and wife while at the same time, looking at it as the springboard of his dignity which sets him equal with other persons. The "unity" which brings together all the elements and the "embodiment" of spiritual values through the act are significant in the deep understanding of the mystery of the generation of the child. The

human being is a body-soul unity as John Paul II would repeatedly stress in his vision of the person. The human person is an embodied soul, or radically an embodied intelligent freedom. Therefore, it behooves that the process through which the child is begotten must also exhibit this deep unity which takes place in the generous embodiment of the spiritual dimension of the marital embrace though the actual sexual act. There is nothing in nature that can substitute this process. An attempt in technology to simulate the act, or even to substitute the act would jeopardize that unity. It is purely a technique that does not embody the spiritual dimension that characterizes the human being. It is a matter that cannot be ignored even by a recent "sci-fi" movie-thriller *Gattaca*, when it rightly avers that "there is no gene for the human spirit."

A Product of Technology

The document *Donum Vitae* also declared that procreation is deprived of its perfection when it is not desired as the fruit of the conjugal act; or that fertilization achieved outside the bodies of the couple remains deprived of the meanings and values which are expressed in the language of the body and in the union of human persons. But the third significant reason why the connection between the sexual act and procreation should be preserved, is the effect it has to the dignity of the child. The Instruction says:

In reality the origin of the human person is the result of an act of giving. The one conceived must be the fruit of his parents' love. He cannot be desired or conceived as the product of the intervention of medical and biological techniques: that would be equivalent to reducing him to an object of scientific technology. No one may subject the coming of a child into the world to conditions of technical efficiency which are to be evaluated according to standards of control and domination.

There is no doubt that in human cloning, the coming of the child is subject to the absolute control of technology. What has been relegated to the mysterious workings of nature, technology has now arrogated to itself. And we see here how the child is radically denied of his right to become the incarnation of the union of his father and mother. At the origin of human procreation are the relationality and

complementarity which the child is unjustly deprived of. As the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAL) puts it:

Human cloning represents a radical manipulation of the constitutive relationality and complementarity which is at the origin of human procreation in both its biological and strictly personal aspects.

The result is appalling: the basic relationships of the human person are perverted: filiation, consanguinity, kinship and parenthood. A woman can be the twin sister of the mother, or may be the daughter of her grandmother... Imagine how a person would lament: *Kapatid ko ang aking Ina*, or worse, *Anak ko ang aking apo*!

Cloning would definitely render the male gender useless which, perhaps for some women would be "good riddance." It takes a woman alone to make another human being who can be fashioned according to her own "image." What it takes is a somatic cell, the egg cell and the womb of that same woman to make it happen. Imagine, too, how cloning would confuse parenthood and genealogy which, in turn, can cause suffering to the human person whose identity is naturally secured by his roots of origin. Not knowing the father can be difficult for the growth of the child, how much more, not having a father!

Human cloning is a direct attack against the uniqueness and therefore, dignity of the person cloned. This happens when the begetting of the child is radically taken out of the mystery of genetic lottery, and subjected to the determination of the human will and technology. This is a case of a total dominion over the existence of the others, to the point of programming their biological identity – selected according to arbitrary and utilitarian criteria (PAL, 1997). This selective concept of man which is inherent in the logic of cloning will have a serious repercussion in shaping a culture that will put the value of human beings, not on their personal identity which is characterized by the spirit, but on those biological qualities that can be appraised and therefore selected. This will inevitably result to a discrimination which awaits the human being who may fail to reach the standards set because of miscalculated technical flaws. And since the child enters the world as a "copy" of another being, his psychic identity will be seriously jeopardized by the merely "virtual" presence of his "other." This will again result to the clone's suffering because he will

be object of unjustly imposing expectations and attention – “to be” or “not to be” his clone parent. Such constitutes a direct attack against his personal subjectivity (PAL, 1997). This is not to mention the unknown potential risks that cloning may pose to the “human products” of such a technique. It must be noted that it took 277 tries before Dolly was finally brought to life. Applied to human beings, we wonder how many embryos would have to be disposed before success could ever be claimed.

Some people may even think that it is okay to clone humans for the sake of harvesting therapeutic materials necessary to save lives. The insurmountable objection against this is the fact that the clone would be a person, not a property, and therefore cannot be used merely as a means to achieve some purpose. As, one author puts it, “the objective of creating human life for the purpose of preparing therapeutic material would clearly not be the dignity of the life created” (Kahn, 1997). Besides the thought of a clone cannibalized for spare parts evokes a horror beyond imagining! And then, what if the cloning technique can cross the barrier of interspecies reproduction and create a clone out of a human being and a chimpanzee, or a human being and a horse. So we confidently thought that the creatures in the “Island of Dr. Moreau” would remain simply in our wildest imagination. The harm which may be inflicted on human creatures when man attempts to go beyond the boundaries of his stewardship is indeed imponderable.

This brings to mind the wisdom of the classical Hippocratic ethical imperative that puts limits to any technique applied to the person: *Primum, non nocere*. Before anything else, do no harm to the person.

At the bottom line of the theological and ethical consideration of cloning is the danger posed by man’s indomitable desire to “play God,” especially in those areas where man is not expected to venture. This human propensity is now driven to an alarming degree because of the great advances he has now attained in science and technology. Science and technology cannot be divorced from values which endow meanings to all that they may accomplish.

Human cloning is one project that reflects the collapse of the happy union between science and human values. Putting it in rather strong words, the Pontifical Academy for Life says:

The 'human cloning' project represents the terrible aberration to which value-free science is driven and is a sign of the profound malaise of our civilization, which looks to science and the 'quality of life' as surrogates for the meaning of life and its salvation.

The issue of cloning puts a threat to the fundamental value of human life. The respect that life deserves must already be secured from the very process it comes forth. That process, the human procreation, is designed by God that needs to be conserved, and therefore any attempt to destroy that design will not go any further without the aberration and harm that would eventually befall on man. God forbid, this would ever happen!

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