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## Human Cloning: Assailing Human Dignity

by Miguel Endara, Ph.D.

The 2005 film, *The Island*, casts a cloak of moral dubiousness over human cloning. In this futuristic production, science has perfected cloning to the point where a for-profit company generates clones to provide replacement organs and parts for wealthy people. This dystopic future troubles the conscience. Nonetheless, we may ask, is the purview of human cloning that *The Island* depicts merely the result of a flight of creative flair by a Hollywood screenwriter or is human cloning necessarily immoral? In this brief article, I argue that cloning is necessarily immoral for it assails human dignity.

### Therapeutic Cloning

There are two types of human cloning, therapeutic and reproductive cloning. Therapeutic cloning, in theory, holds the great promise that medical research may develop new and novel regenerative therapies for a wide range of disabling human diseases and injuries some of which are, so far, incurable. For example, people suffering cardiovascular disease, Krabbe disease, autoimmune diseases, diabetes, osteoporosis, distinct forms of cancer, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, severe burns, spinal-cord injuries, congenital defects, and more, may experience relief or even full restoration of health. Further, therapeutic cloning circumvents immune rejection by using the patient's own cells in the therapies.

The usual procedure used in therapeutic cloning is somatic cell nuclear transplant (SCNT). In this procedure, a surgically removed oocyte's nucleus is transplanted with a nucleus taken from a cell of the patient in question. A

spark of electricity usually prompts the newly formed oocyte to generate an embryo through the division of cells. Anywhere from 4 to 6 days later, the embryonic stem cells are harvested. The multiplied cells are then coaxed to develop into the needed type of human cells and are re-introduced into the body of the patient as part of a regenerative therapy.

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The SCNT is morally problematic because it necessarily destroys the embryo. This embryo is a distinct human being; it has the genetic makeup characteristic of humans, and it is a complete organism in a nascent stage of development. Given health and a conducive environment, the organism will grow following the normal human stages of development.

In other words, from the time the oocyte enters into a stage of mitosis onward, it is, if healthy, fully programmed to develop to become a mature human being. Therefore, therapeutic human cloning results in the destruction of nascent human life.

### Reproductive cloning

Reproductive cloning is the cloning of a human with the intent to produce a fully formed individual. This type of cloning usually also employs the SCNT procedure. However, instead of destroying the embryo to harvest its stem cells, the embryo is placed in the uterus of a woman usually between 2 and 5 days after fertilization so that it may continue to grow and develop. So far, there is no substantial evidence that this procedure has been successful. [1]

## Why would anyone want to clone a human being?

There are many reasons given for reproductive cloning. Among the more common ones: Some claim that cloning is more natural in treating infertility than other widely practiced techniques such as fertilizing donor eggs with a husband's sperm. One's right to bear a child "does not include a right to have a child by whatever means." [2]

The problem is that cloning interrupts the marital relationship by introducing a third-party into the process and by intentionally creating a child with a biological connection to only one of her parents. The clone would be, biologically, not the child of the donor parent but its twin and if it has any siblings, it would be the parent of these. For these and many other reasons, the possibility of the child to form a healthy identity would be severely challenged.

Other parents may want to clone their children who have died in infancy. They might desire to bring back these children, at least partially, thus easing their grief. While allowing for this scenario sounds compassionate, it fails to enable parents to go through the needed grieving process of facing the reality of their child's death. It also places an undue burden on the clone, in that he is expected to fill the role of another and will likely be hindered, once again, in forging his unique identity.

Whatever reasons persons may have for cloning another, reproductive cloning, by its process leads to elevated risks to the physical and mental health of the child. For example, cloned mammals, experience a variety of defects in the liver, brain, and heart. Other problems include premature aging and immune system deficiencies. But in the case of primates, such as humans, the difficulty and dangers of reproductive cloning are greater, due to a greater possibility of damage to the primate's oocyte. [3]

### Conclusion

The Island portrays a possible way to assail the dignity of clones. Yet, the moral problem is worse than this. Whether destroying humans in their nascent stage of development or subjecting them to high risks of physical and psychological harm, cloning unnecessarily subjects humans to a high risk of severe injury. Therefore, human cloning necessarily assails dignity and is thereby necessarily immoral.

- [1] "Cloning Facts Sheet," National Human Genome Research Institute, May 11, 2016. <https://www.genome.gov/25020028/cloning-factsheet/# al-11>.
- [2] Leon R. Kass, Human Cloning and Human Dignity: A Report of the President's Council on Bioethics (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), chapter 5, <https://bioethicsarchive.georgetown.edu/pcbe/reports/cloningreport/children.html>.
- [3] "Cloning Facts Sheet," *ibid*.

### Glossary

**Mitosis:** part of the cell's life cycle when the duplicated chromosomes separate to form two new cells.

**Oocyte:** an immature ovum or egg cell.

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