

The Debate about Cloning - Part II

By Sam Vaknin

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How to cope with your abuser?

Sometimes it looks hopeless. II. Issues in the Calculus of Rights

IIA. The Hierarchy of Rights

All human cultures have hierarchies of rights. These hierarchies reflect cultural mores and lores and there cannot, therefore, be a universal, or eternal hierarchy.

In Western moral systems, the Right to Life supersedes all other rights (including the right to one's body, to comfort, to the avoidance of pain, to property, etc.).

Yet, this hierarchical arrangement does not help us to resolve cases in which there is a clash of EQUAL rights (for instance, the conflicting rights to life of two people). One way to decide among equally potent claims is randomly (by flipping a coin, or casting dice). Alternatively, we could add and subtract rights in a somewhat macabre arithmetic. If a mother's life is endangered by the continued existence of a fetus and assuming both of them have a right to life we can decide to kill the fetus by adding to the mother's right to life her right to her own body and thus outweighing the fetus' right to life.

IIB. The Difference between Killing and Letting Die

There is an assumed difference between killing (taking life) and letting die (not saving a life). This is supported by IE above. While there is a right not to be killed - there is no right to have one's own life saved. Thus, while there is an obligation not to kill - there is no obligation to save a life.

IIC. Killing the Innocent

Often the continued existence of an innocent person (IP) threatens to take the life of a victim (V). By "innocent" we mean "not guilty" - not responsible for killing V, not intending to kill V, and not knowing that V will be killed due to IP's actions or continued existence.

It is simple to decide to kill IP to save V if IP is going to die anyway shortly, and the remaining life of V, if saved, will be much longer than the remaining life of IP, if not

killed. All other variants require a calculus of hierarchically weighted rights. (See "Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life" by Baruch A. Brody).

One form of calculus is the utilitarian theory. It calls for the maximization of utility (life, happiness, pleasure). In other words, the life, happiness, or pleasure of the many outweigh the life, happiness, or pleasure of the few. It is morally permissible to kill IP if the lives of two or more people will be saved as a result and there is no other way to save their lives. Despite strong philosophical objections to some of the premises of utilitarian theory - I agree with its practical prescriptions.

In this context - the dilemma of killing the innocent - one can also call upon the right to self defence. Does V have a right to kill IP regardless of any moral calculus of rights? Probably not. One is rarely justified in taking another's life to save one's own. But such behaviour cannot be condemned. Here we have the flip side of the confusion - understandable and perhaps inevitable behaviour (self defence) is mistaken for a MORAL RIGHT. That most V's would kill IP and that we would all sympathize with V and understand its behaviour does not mean that V had a RIGHT to kill IP. V may have had a right to kill IP - but this right is not automatic, nor is it all-encompassing.

But is the Egg - Alive?

This question is NOT equivalent to the ancient quandary of "when does life begin". Life crystallizes, at the earliest, when an egg and a sperm unite (i.e., at the moment of fertilization). Life is not a potential - it is a process triggered by an event. An unfertilized egg is neither a process - nor an event. It does not even possess the potential to become alive unless and until it merges with a sperm. Should such merger not occur - it will never develop life.

The potential to become X is not the ontological equivalent of actually being X, nor does it spawn moral and ethical rights and obligations pertaining to X. The transition from potential to being is not trivial, nor is it automatic, or inevitable, or independent of context. Atoms of various elements have the potential to become an egg (or, for that matter, a human being) - yet no one would claim that they ARE an egg (or a human being), or that they should be treated as one (i.e., with the same rights and obligations).

Moreover, it is the donor nucleus embedded in the egg that endows it with life - the life of the cloned baby. Yet, the nucleus is usually extracted from a muscle or the skin. Should we treat a muscle or a skin cell with the same reverence the critics of cloning wish to accord an unfertilized egg?

Is This the Main Concern?

The main concern is that cloning - even the therapeutic kind - will produce piles of embryos. Many of them - close to 95% with current biotechnology - will die. Others can be surreptitiously and illegally implanted in the wombs of "surrogate mothers".

It is patently immoral, goes the precautionary argument, to kill so many embryos. Cloning is such a novel technique that its success rate is still unacceptably low. There are alternative ways to harvest stem cells - less costly in terms of human life. If we

accept that life begins at the moment of fertilization, this argument is valid. But it also implies that - once cloning becomes safer and scientists more adept - cloning itself should be permitted.

This is anathema to those who fear a slippery slope. They abhor the very notion of "unnatural" conception. To them, cloning is a narcissistic act and an ignorant and dangerous interference in nature's sagacious ways. They would ban procreative cloning, regardless of how safe it is. Therapeutic cloning - with its mounds of discarded fetuses - will allow rogue scientists to cross the boundary between permissible (curative cloning) and illegal (baby cloning).

Why Should Baby Cloning be Illegal?

Cloning's opponents object to procreative cloning because it can be abused to design babies, skew natural selection, unbalance nature, produce masters and slaves and so on. The "argument from abuse" has been raised with every scientific advance - from in vitro fertilization to space travel.

Every technology can be potentially abused. Television can be either a wonderful educational tool - or an addictive and mind numbing pastime. Nuclear fission is a process that yields both nuclear weapons and atomic energy. To claim, as many do, that cloning touches upon the "heart" of our existence, the "kernel" of our being, the very "essence" of our nature - and thus threatens life itself - would be incorrect.

There is no "privileged" form of technological abuse and no hierarchy of potentially abusive technologies. Nuclear fission tackles natural processes as fundamental as life. Nuclear weapons threaten life no less than cloning. The potential for abuse is not a sufficient reason to arrest scientific research and progress - though it is a necessary condition.

Some fear that cloning will further the government's enmeshment in the healthcare system and in scientific research. Power corrupts and it is not inconceivable that governments will ultimately abuse and misuse cloning and other biotechnologies. Nazi Germany had a state-sponsored and state-mandated eugenics program in the 1930's.

Yet, this is another variant of the argument from abuse. That a technology can be abused by governments does not imply that it should be avoided or remain undeveloped. This is because all technologies - without a single exception - can and are abused routinely - by governments and others. This is human nature.

Fukuyama raised the possibility of a multi-tiered humanity in which "natural" and "genetically modified" people enjoy different rights and privileges. But why is this inevitable? Surely this can easily be tackled by proper, prophylactic, legislation?

All humans, regardless of their pre-natal history, should be treated equally. Are children currently conceived in vitro treated any differently to children conceived in utero? They are not. There is no reason that cloned or genetically-modified children should belong to distinct legal classes.

Unbalancing Nature

It is very anthropocentric to argue that the proliferation of genetically enhanced or genetically selected children will somehow unbalance nature and destabilize the precarious equilibrium it maintains. After all, humans have been modifying, enhancing, and eliminating hundreds of thousands of species for well over 10,000 years now. Genetic modification and bio-engineering are as natural as agriculture. Human beings are a part of nature and its manifestation. By definition, everything they do is natural.

Why would the genetic alteration or enhancement of one more species - homo sapiens - be of any consequence? In what way are humans "more important" to nature, or "more crucial" to its proper functioning? In our short history on this planet, we have genetically modified and enhanced wheat and rice, dogs and cows, tulips and orchids, oranges and potatoes. Why would interfering with the genetic legacy of the human species be any different?

Effects on Society

Cloning - like the Internet, the television, the car, electricity, the telegraph, and the wheel before it - is bound to have great social consequences. It may foster "embryo industries". It may lead to the exploitation of women - either willingly ("egg prostitution") or unwillingly ("womb slavery"). Charles Krauthammer, a columnist and psychiatrist, quoted in "The Economist", says:

"(Cloning) means the routinisation, the commercialisation, the commodification of the human embryo."

Exploiting anyone unwillingly is a crime, whether it involves cloning or white slavery. But why would egg donations and surrogate motherhood be considered problems? If we accept that life begins at the moment of fertilization and that a woman owns her body and everything within it - why should she not be allowed to sell her eggs or to host another's baby and how would these voluntary acts be morally repugnant? In any case, human eggs are already being bought and sold and the supply far exceeds the demand.

Moreover, full-fledged humans are routinely "routinised, commercialized, and commodified" by governments, corporations, religions, and other social institutions. Consider war, for instance - or commercial advertising. How is the "routinisation, commercialization, and commodification" of embryos more reprehensible than the "routinisation, commercialization, and commodification" of fully formed human beings?

Curing and Saving Life

Cell therapy based on stem cells often leads to tissue rejection and necessitates costly and potentially dangerous immunosuppressive therapy. But when the stem cells are harvested from the patient himself and cloned, these problems are averted. Therapeutic cloning has vast untapped - though at this stage still remote - potential to improve the lives of hundreds of millions.

As far as "designer babies" go, pre-natal cloning and genetic engineering can be used

to prevent disease or cure it, to suppress unwanted traits, and to enhance desired ones. It is the moral right of a parent to make sure that his progeny suffers less, enjoys life more, and attains the maximal level of welfare throughout his or her life.

That such technologies can be abused by over-zealous, or mentally unhealthy parents in collaboration with avaricious or unscrupulous doctors - should not prevent the vast majority of stable, caring, and sane parents from gaining access to them.

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Hair cloning as a viable treatment for hair loss conditions.

By Richard Mitchell

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One of the most exciting recent developments in the search to find new solutions for hair loss has been research investigating hair cloning. Properly known as follicle cloning or multiplication, it involves taking a sample of a person's hair follicle cells, multiplying them in a lab and injecting them back into the patient's scalp. The aim obviously is to generate natural hair regrowth without the need for invasive surgery. But can we realistically expect this treatment to become available in the foreseeable future?

Unfortunately the process is not yet possible but research is underway to perfect it. Current predictions suggest that it is unlikely to become available to the public for at least ten years.

The name of the process is a little misleading as it really refers to cell therapy rather than true cloning. Once perfected it would involve taking a small sample of tissue from the scalp and then creating a culture that would allow the follicle cells to multiply. The theory is that the few sample cells would multiply to become several hundred thousand that could then be injected back into the scalp to create several thousand new hairs.

The major obstacles that must be overcome include the following:

- There is no certainty that the replicated cells can develop into hairs.
- There is no guarantee that the new hairs will grow to the same thickness, color or direction as the existing hair coverage.
- There needs to be certainty that the cloned cells do not introduce serious health problems such as the growth of cancerous tumors.

Clearly hair cloning offers exciting possibilities for the treatment of hair loss in the future but for now, you'd best stick with the more limited treatments that at least are currently available.

Please go to [Hair Loss Solutions](#) to find out more about the issues covered in this article.

Richard Mitchell is the creator of the www.myhairlossadvisor.com website that provides information and guidance to those suffering from premature hair loss.

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