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Gregory Pence on Human Cloning: An Ethical Evaluation

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Abstract

Human cloning is one of the new reproductive technologies. It is among the most controversial and hotly debated topic in bioethics. The central point of controversy has been, is it right to clone or not? This question has dominated contemporary discussions in bioethics. It has attracted a lot of arguments and counter arguments. It has been a point of divergence among philosophers, medical practitioners, theologians and psychologists. In fact this has further raised a lot of ethical, legal and social challenges that need urgent attention. Human cloning has a lot of advantages which include assisting infertile couples to have genetically related children and availability of organs for transplant. Research also testifies that cloning can improve the genetic health of future generation/children. Amidst this good news there has been itching and clamour from several quarters for human cloning to be banned. Philosophers especially bioethicists have posited strong arguments to justify the prohibition of human cloning. Gregory Pence a strong proponent of human cloning argues that cloning has a lot of advantages that humanity can tap from if allowed to continue. In his argument there is nothing wrong with human cloning rather fear and ignorance make people to condemn it. In this connection this paper argues that despite the benefits of human cloning, it still raises some ethical and social challenges. It threatens the dignity of human beings, can lead to abuses and commodification of human beings.

Key Words: Cloning, Ethics, Reproduction, Therapeutic, Gene

Introduction

Ian Wilmut and Keith Campbell of Roslin Institute in Scotland in 1997 announced the birth of the first cloned mammal (sheep) named Dolly. With the birth of Dolly, cloning as an artificial reproduction was no longer a fiction but a reality. Since after the birth of Dolly, many other mammals like goats, pigs, cows, cats, mice, tadpoles and rodents have been successfully cloned. It has been used in horticulture. With the advancement and development in cloning, human beings became the next target. It became apparent that cloning will soon be done in humans. There was an outburst of condemnation on cloning humans. Many countries banned human cloning. New York for instance, banned cloning and pronounced it illegal. Conservatives, Catholic Bishops Conference, Bioethicists and various religious bodies condemned it and pleaded the states to put laws banning human cloning and pronouncing it illegal. Scientists began cloning human embryos and duplicating human parts with the same constitution. The cloning of embryos stirred uproar and clamour from various directions opposing it. Former President of United States, Bill Clinton then placed a ban on all federal support for human cloning research. Cloning humans was seen as morally unacceptable. In cloning, human beings are no more born naturally but now manufactured identically in a factory. Many saw it as a dangerous venture that will destroy the human race and undermine the individuality and autonomy of each person. Many also welcomed it as a breakthrough in the field of medical science especially as it saves infertile couples from childlessness. Gregory Pence sees human cloning and monozygotic twinning as one and the same thing. Gregory Pence who lectures on Philosophy and Medical Ethics at the University of Alabama at Birmingham argues that cloning will improve the genetic makeup of future generation. He is of the view that the advantages of cloning outweigh the risk and disadvantages. These and more are quite interesting and heart-warming but there are some ethical issues that emanate from this technique that needs to be considered.

What is Cloning?

The word clone is from the Greek work “klon” meaning twig, offshoot or a “slip of plant that is taken out for propagation.” The word clone was coined by a psychologist, Herbert J, Webber in 1903 as a process whereby a plant is produced asexually from a parent plant through cutting, bulbs r buds. Cloning is a process whereby a genetically identical copy of a cell or an organism is generated or produced asexually. Feinberg defined cloning as: “the artificial reproduction of an organism which is the exact genetic copy of a living organism” (249). Cloning is the making of an identical copy of a giving being. In fact cloning can be said to be a photocopy of a particular being be it human, plant or animal. It replicates a being already in existence. American Medical Association defined cloning as simply “copying a person”. (1) To clone is to create a person again. Varga has it that cloning is to “make a carbon copy or more technically to realize a nucleus transplantation of the donor of the cell nuclei.” (77). To clone is to duplicate a person as often as the cloner wants. Eknnia defines it “as the method of producing a baby that has the same genetic genes as its parents.”(117). Human cloning therefore “is the creation of a genetically identical copy of an existing or previously existing human being or growing cloned tissue from that individual.” (www.sciencedaily) For Iroegbu cloning “is the repetition of, the representing of and re-production of a given being.” (637). It is an asexual form of reproduction. Human cloning is a complex term and it has been variously defined by different schools of thought and associations. In a nutshell human cloning is the scientific production of genetically identical copy of a human being. A clone then is an organism asexually produced from another organism and who is genetically identical to it. Example Dolly (the sheep). It is one that resembles another genetically. A clone for Pantaleon is “an organism that has the same nuclear genome as another organism, they have an identity of being, structure, characteristics and constitution and content.” (636) Clones have similar genetic identity though with different existence. A clone is one who seems to be exactly as the original. A clone has the same genetic makeup like the original. It is a product of artificial reproduction in a laboratory.

Types of Cloning

1. Reproductive Cloning (Adult DNA Cloning)

This is the method used to produce Dolly. Reproductive cloning produces an embryo, part of the individual or even the whole being. It is the “reproduction of the part of the body or embryo such that it can grow as a full-fledged individual of its own right.” (Pentaleon 638). The technique involves the following steps: “the DNA from an adult ovum is removed and replaced with the DNA from a cell removed from an adult animal or human being. It has been scientifically proven that with the exception of the sperm and ovum, every cell in the body contains all the genetic material in its DNA to theoretically create an exact clone of the original body.” (Ekennia 118) In adult DNA, the ovum is electrically stimulated as if fertilized by sperm and eventually divides to form an embryo. Then the embryo will be inserted into a woman’s womb who carries it as a surrogate mother to term.

2. Therapeutic Cloning

The process is the same as reproductive cloning. But “the stem cells are however removed from the pre-embryo with the intention to producing tissue or whole organ for transplant back into the person from whom the DNA was taken.” (Pentaleon 638) in therapeutic cloning, the embryo is not implanted into the woman’s womb but it is used to generate stem cells for human spare parts. In therapeutic cloning the nucleus of an egg is extracted which holds the genetic makeup of a human or animal. The somatic cell which is anybody cell other egg or sperm and the nucleus of this cell is extracted. When the embryonic stem cell is taken the embryo dies. Therapeutic cloning is usually to help the sick person in need. It is used for therapy and not for reproduction. The embryonic stem contains the DNA of the original person so the issue of rejection of the transplanted organ is ruled out.

3. Embryonic Cloning

It is the medical technique employed in getting monozygotic twins or triplet. The technique goes thus “the fertilized egg become a zygote, an embryo, it divides into two and then four identical cells. At this stage the cells can be separated and allowed to develop into separate but identical blastocyst which can be implanted in the uterus. Twins or triplets are thus formed with identical DNA. The DNA comes from the egg of the woman and sperm of the man. The embryos have identical DNA like those formed naturally in the case of monozygotic (identical) twins.” (Ekennia 117). This type of cloning has been going on with animals but not been applied yet in humans except in IVF.

4. Gregory Pence’s Justification of Human Cloning

For Pence, cloning and monozygotic twinning are one and the same thing. In his words “if there is nothing bad about having twins naturally; why should it be wrong to use cloning techniques to bring about the delayed birth of a twin?” (129) Pence argued that condemnations and opposing views against cloning do not even know what cloning entails. Their condemnation is not a product of moral wisdom. Pence in his defence of human cloning first reject that the cloned is an exact copy of the adult human being completely. For him, in several senses they cannot be an exact copy of the adult human being completely. For him, in several senses they cannot be exactly the same. There will be definitely differences though minor variations. He states that: according to a chemist who thinks about such things, the probability of any two cloned hemoglobin molecules in a human body are the same is close to zero. The probability of any two cloned human bodies being identical down to their last cell is virtually zero because exactly identical goes way down as the complexity goes up.”(131) In his view cloning do not threaten our individuality because the brain which is the most complicated human organ essential to the continuity of the self cannot be duplicated from a DNA blue print. The brain which contains all my experiences cannot be cloned or duplicated according to Pence.

However, clones are not drones but are like every other human being. For him, the idea that they are not equal to people reproduced naturally should be rejected. On this he writes: “it is a widely accepted, general principle of modern philosophical ethics that people should be treated equally as moral agents unless there is a morally relevant reason to treat them otherwise.” (131) Every person whether cloned or born naturally deserves equal respect and worth. He based his view on the Kantian, utilitarian and Judeo Christian ethical theories which placed impartiality at the centre of ethics. He argues that for anyone to discriminate between these two groups of persons must have relevant reason. In his opinion people should not be discriminated because of their origin. For him “people are people and it should not matter how they came to exist. He calls this the principle of Non-Discrimination by Origins” (132). We should not treat people unequally based on prejudice. The principle of non-discrimination means that: “no one should suffer any prejudice because of how he was created whether a child originated because of unmarried parents, one parent and an unwanted pregnancy, in-vitro fertilization, gameticintrafallopian transfer (GIFT), as a twin, triplet or quadruplet or quintuplet should not matter” (132). He is saying that no matter how a person or a child comes to life he/she deserves equal respect and has equal worth with the rest of the people. We should not see cloned persons as drones subhuman, slaves or second class citizens. They are not different from other children because they will be gestated by normal women for nine months, raised by normal parents in a normal environment, the only difference is that they would only inherit one set of genes and not mixed genes. He also advised that cloned humans should not be killed or used as means to an end. Killing them for their organs for him is like “knocking out your brother, transporting him to a hospital anesthetizing him and taking out one of his organs for transplant” (133).

Pence also denied the assumption that one can clone himself. For him this is not possible. In this direction he writes “suppose I persuade my wife to undergo minor surgery, have an egg removed by laparoscopy, have its nucleus cut out and have my genes inserted. She will then spend nine months gestating the embryo and because I might be killed in some accident, making an implicit commitment to raising the child until adulthood” (133). He has it that even when such a done, the child will not be exactly him or a carbon copy of him. In the first place he will be a baby not an old man of 50 years like him. The time in which he is growing will be different from the time he grew. The events of both times are different, the centuries will be different, and his will be the 21st century, computer or internet age, his experiences generally different. So in this angle if I think I can clone myself then I will be disappointed. For Pence we have the personal liberty and right to reproduce. Any objection to this right will be an “offensive grave violation of your personal liberty” (135). The Democracy we practice points to our freedom to reproduce and right to personal decisions. Pence quoting James Hughes states that: “we allow people to make reproductive choices and this (originating a human by cloning) is a further extension of that. If a parent wants to clone a dead child as an act of love, it may be neurotic, but is it any less neurotic than wanting another child to replace a dead child?” (135). In his argument people have right to privacy, people should not be compelled to know if they are at risk of genetic diseases and such diseases respected when there is no treatment, engaged couples should not be forced to test for genetic diseases. People should be free in their choice of reproduction. He states that “parents should be morally free to pursue whatever alternative reproductive technology available to avoid the birth of a child with serious genetic disorder” (135). For him this principle extends to various types of reproduction including (NST) Nuclear Somatic Transfer. For him this right includes both stopping pregnancy, free from unwanted government intrusion into individual matters to beget children, and undergo medical procedure to get children.

Pence further argued that cloning assists in giving our children better genetic makeup. He also stated that although in doing this mistakes might arise but he does not see it as a reason not to go further because we often make several mistakes in life like choosing schools, planning pregnancy and so on. Mistakes cannot justify banning it. It will benefit the child because he/she will be offered a better

genetic heritage. In his view the benefits outweighs the risk. Pence borrowed the concept of justice in John Rawls to argue that we should improve human race by making future generations more talented. Applying Rawls theory of justice, Pence argues that our civil liberties should not be infringed upon by the government or the state and an attempt to impose procreative method on us is a violation of such liberty. Even when the state warns that we should not procreate in certain ways, it is also a violation of this liberty. For him following Rawls theory of justice we are not just permitted to improve our race but it is an obligation. It is wrong to allow future generation to inherit bad genes when we could have improved it. Pence used this to justify human cloning as a means of improving the genetic makeup of our future children. Pence further added another point that cloning enables gay men and lesbians to become genetic parents. They will not need to look for egg or sperm donors. He said that lesbians can with cloning become parents using NST where one supplies the gene, the other the eggs and carrying of the child to term. He said even the so called gay gene people argue will be transmitted is only 2% possibility. But people have come up that the child produced by NST by lesbians will not have a male genetic connection. Pence replied that “the child would have a genetic connection to the father of the woman whose genotype was used and the child might one day seek out a relationship with her male ancestors” (139). For him, there is no difference between children of heterosexual and homosexual. The task of making good kids is not sexual orientation but good parenting by both married and unmarried, heterosexuals and homosexuals. There is no reason to deny lesbians or gays the right to use NST.

In conclusion, Pence stated that it is a procreative liberty for anyone to use NST for procreation and the child benefits more by being free from some genetic diseases. Secondly, there is a genetic connection in NST just like in sexual reproduction. Even originating a child by NST from the father strengthens some marriages and makes both parties biologically connected to the child. Lastly, following Rawls, Pence stated that NST is one of the tools we can use to improve the genetic health of future generations. It also gives the gay and lesbians opportunity to become parents which is a good thing for Pence.

Ethical and Social Concerns of Human Cloning

Cloning which is nothing but the multiplication of species is not a bad thing but what matters is the intention and consequences of the practice. Bioethics has the task of raising society’s consciousness and giving an unbiased approach to these new reproductive technologies. The intention of cloning and the use made of the cloned is where the problem lies not really in the act of cloning because bioethics is not anti-science or against advancement in science. The intention of the person cloning another is very crucial in assessing the practice of cloning. Cloning as means to extract organs for transplant is not morally right. At this point, it involves creating in order to destroy or outright killing of the clone. The human embryo is involved here and it has been severally argued and proved that human person no matter how it is generated. The human embryo even at the nuclear embryonic stage should not be destroyed but therapeutic cloning is guilty of this. Cloned human embryos are human beings so long as it is a combination of human egg, a nucleus or sperm. The result must surely be a human embryo and not a goat or sheep embryo. Since they are human, it must be accorded the right to life. They should not be sacrificed just to benefit another. This is what therapeutic cloning does. We are very much aware of the need to help sick persons especially those in need of organs but we cannot use a human being as means to an end.

Cloning a human embryo just to get an organ to replace defective organ is the intention of therapeutic cloning. Scientists argue that with cloning many diseases hitherto incurable will become curable. Ekennia on this says that: “it is the hope of the scientists that one day human cloning may reverse heart tissue, some echo that with cloning especially stem harvesting Alzheimer Parkinson and degenerative joint disease may become curable” (127). It has also been said that the advantage is that

the cloned will be an exact genetic makeup with the intending recipient of the organ, like kidney or bone marrow transplant. For Wilmut “treatment and cures to many disease can and can only become available through stem cell cloning.” (www.proquestk12.com) The problem of searching for donor will be solved with therapeutic cloning. This no doubt will save many sick persons from dying which is a good thing to be encouraged. The question of rejection of organs will not be there again because they will have the same DNA. All these benefits are interesting and sound endless but at whose expense? It is definitely, at the expense of the cloned embryo. You cannot rob Peter to pay Paul. The destruction of the embryo is murder or if you like abortion. Destroying the embryo is destroying human life. Wilton Gregory writes that those who encourage therapeutic cloning just “want to treat the resulting human being as subhuman, creating them solely so they can destroy them for their cells and tissues” (American catholic.org). Therapeutic cloning just creates life to destroy it and this calls for concern. Pence also frown at this even though he argued for the justification of cloning.

In cloning our individuality is tampered with. Every human being is unique and autonomous. Mimicking another is tampering with his/her natural individuality. Cloning treats human beings as a being that can be replaced at will or at the slightest instance. It sees human being as an instrument that can be used for any purpose whatsoever. “It makes the person a pure utility object” (Pantaleon 645). Human being is a being that has dignity that is why if a life is lost people mourn because human life is irreplaceable. De Mello-Martin on this argues that: “the respect for the dignity of the human person is not based only on the human gene where cloning operates. It is based on the entire nature, function and role of the human person. These and other elements combine to make up the person and from all together his dignity derives. Human life, not only human genes are important” (245-265). Cloning also destroys the autonomy, freedom and individuality of the cloned. He is nothing but a copy of another. Even when cells are extracted from it no one cares about what happens to it. It is taken as an experimental object, an object without worth or value.

Cloning, as Pence argued, can help better the genetic makeup of future generation is an applause for this technique. We will always want our children to have better and good genetic makeup and to be healthy. This means that it can lead to eugenic changes. But cloning cannot claim to offer solution to all the problems of man. It is still under study and promising to be a panacea to all the health challenges of man can be seen as promising more than it can actually do. It has contributed to helping infertile couples to have children but we should realize that infertility is not a disease. It has contributed positively in this direction. In reproductive cloning for instance “the husband who is completely sterile would provide a cell from his body that would fertilize the ovum of his wife, and all the genetic information of the child would come from the man’s cell. It appears that most parents would prefer this technology to using another man’s sperm to fertilize the wife’s ovum” (Ekennia 129). This will eradicate the problems associated with using sperm or egg from donors. Cloning can assist humans in this direction but it is good to note that the chances of cloning while claiming to have the capacity of curing diseases and promoting genetic makeup and health of future generation should realize that nutrition and environment also contribute in making a healthy person. Cloning alone cannot fully provide a healthy future generation exclusive of nutrition and good environment. Even its contribution will not also be assessable to everyone because of its cost; the poor cannot readily afford it.

According to Pence, we are at liberty to contract any means of reproduction. Yes, this is true because man is endowed with freedom. According to Jean Jacque Rousseau, freedom is a fundamental right of man but it is not unlimited. Though couples may have the liberty to use any artificial means of reproduction but they should also consider the implication of such act on the child they are about to produce, the psychological and social stigma that follow suit. Imagine a child growing up to discover that he/she was cloned. The stigma will even make him/her think he/she is less human and if by chance he suffers any defect, it will be attributed to the fact that he was cloned. As we enjoy our

freedom and liberty to use artificial means of reproduction, we should put in perspective the effect of such decision on the future generation. Our liberty if not put under check can be catastrophic. That is the reason laws are put in place to check human excesses such as over stepping boundaries as regards artificial reproduction. Humans cannot be above nature as nature has a way of limiting our freedom. Cloners should realize that we are part of nature and not alone or above nature. Our right to procreate even artificially is not limitless. Benator writes the “autonomy rights cannot permit risking severe harm to children, those who risk transmitting HIV for instance, cannot assert a right to reproduce while the moral costs of forced abortion or sterilization are immense, the moral cost of moderate coercion or directive counselling should be weighed against the moral costs of harm to future children” (94). Our freedom is limited. For instance, ones liberty to procreate can be limited by lack of resources or health challenges amongst others. Our freedom of reproduction should also consider the freedom of the cloned individual because we are making him/her an identical copy of another person. It denies him/her the unique identity and authenticity. The advantages or merits of cloning to humanity are enormous but if not checked it could lead to abuses. Scientists can clone humans not to get spare parts for transplant but for other unethical reasons. People can clone humans for sex (as sex machine), slaves and so on. You do not underestimate what human’s can do. Human being will soon become like any other object that can be produced at will. The rich can pay medical scientist to clone a human being for him/her for a personal purpose. The value and intrinsic worth of a human being will be lost. Man now becomes an object or like any other lower animal. It can turn to a form of child trafficking. As long as you have the money to pay, you can get a clone. Cloning if not checked can get to the point where stores for human spare parts will be built, buying and selling of human parts will become the order of the day. It will eventually dehumanize, instrumentalize and make man a commodity to be made and used. That moral attachment and which is an exclusive preserve of humans as rational beings held responsible for their action will be lost.

Lastly, cloning like Pence argued should be encouraged because gays and lesbians through it get children. Gay activities and lesbianism have been condemned in strong terms as unnatural immoral sexual act. When children are born through cloning by single parents, there will surely be a confusion of parentage, lineage and rupture of family relations. It will destroy our family and socio-communal life. Making children through cloning by single parents threaten the stability of family life. According to Pantoleon “the family and its intimate values of security and belongingness would disappear.”(644). Homosexuals and lesbians use cloning as a means of getting children. Among lesbians one donates her egg and another gets the nuclear genetic material. Cloning threatens the worth of human parenthood and conjugal love. The removal of procreation from marriage between a man and a woman would weaken the bond between them. Even Pence argument that identical twins and clones are the same thing has been refuted. According to Morscher “the existentially and morally relevant differences consist in the fact that identical twins exist synchronically or simultaneously; whereas the cloned individual starts living only after the original from which it has been cloned and knows about this fact.”(125) Identical twins come naturally but clone has original from where its gene is manually collected. They are manipulated or manmade. Pence point that one cannot clone oneself, cannot be true. Pence saying this seems to mean that he does not really understand what cloning is. Cloning is the multiplication of another being. It means both have the same genetic makeup so one can definitely clone oneself. Genetic makeup is different from experiences for instance; we have the same genetic makeup with our parents but different experiences and theirs are not the same. The time they grew is different from ours. Pence using experience to argue that we cannot clone oneself does not follow.

Conclusion

I am not arguing against the development of science and technology in medicine. Gregory Pence’s reasons for justifying cloning are welcomed but they are not satisfactory. I am not condemning

cloning in all its entirety because it has contributed a lot to the good and betterment of the life of man. In infertility problems, giving better genes and so many more but my worry is that it leads to the death of many embryos when stem cells are extracted from it in therapeutic cloning. Again, human beings, being what they are scientists in particular if not properly checked and laws put in place to check excesses, cloning could be abused and man will eventually lose its intrinsic value and becomes an object that could be produced, used and destroyed at will. Further Pence using it to justify immoral sexual behaviours of homosexuality and lesbianism is worrisome. Cloning is a positive breakthrough in medicine. Its ability to treat diseases, replace organs in the body, solve infertility problems cannot be swept under the carpet. Cloning in doing its wonders must be guided by ethical and legal compass so that it does not lead to the destruction of human being has been confirmed, there has been insinuations of cloned human beings ranging from the baby girl named Eve who was said to have been born through caesarean section on 26th December 2002 who is a clone of a 31years old American woman. We also heard of Justin de Sera. All these claims have been on the internet news but no one has confirmed them. This shows that cloning is still at the remote level. Medical ethics emphasizes that ethical compass should direct all new biotechnological and reproductive technologies so that while we derive the benefits of these advancements our intrinsic value as humans remain intact.

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