

Cloning: A Dream Or a Nightmare?

By Richard DuJardin
Religious News Service

Years ago the cloning of humans may have been dismissed as a science fiction writer's dream.

But with the first successful cloning recently of genetically identical mice from mouse embryos — the first cloning of a mammal — that dream may no longer be unthinkable.

In fact, at least some scientists now believe that the creation of human clones — genetically exact duplicates of other human embryos or even copies of adult human beings — is no longer an impossibility. The question now, they say, is not whether it can be done, but should it be done.

"If you can clone a mouse, then you obviously have the potentiality for cloning a human," said University of Minnesota professor Robert McKinnell.

But Prof. McKinnell, who has produced hundreds of frog clones in the laboratory, says human cloning raises many ethical problems that need to be addressed not only by the religious but by the scientific community.

Indeed, another early pioneer in frog cloning, Dr. Thomas King, now the director of the Kennedy Institute in Washington, says he has strong reservations about any cloning experiments that would involve human embryos.

Dr. King said he just couldn't put a time on how long it will take scientists to develop the process of creating a human clone through the transplantation of nuclei from a embryo. He said he didn't know if it was at all possible to make a clone from an adult tissue — the sort of cloning that could lead to the creation of exact duplicates of adult human beings and which fits the more popular conception of cloning.

"But even if you overcame those barriers, once you get into the human condition, you get into an area that transcends science," he says. "It's not a normal phenomenon. One of the big factors deals with the fact that all the techniques are not going to be successful. There's only a limited number of embryos that can be implanted. What do you do with the embryos that are wasted?"

Dr. King called for a full

public airing on the issue, suggesting that national guidelines be set up for public discussion.

Actually, debate over the morality of human cloning has been under way for more than a decade. Much of it has been of the exotic popular variety, shaped by tales of creating a new race of adult clones, exact duplicates of living human beings, who would be able to do one's menial chores, or be kept in a semi-conscious state in a storage room to be used as a "spare parts bin" if you needed a new kidney or a new heart.

There has even been talk of using clones to fight mankind's wars, or of using the cloning process to turn out new Einsteins or several new Bruce Jenners.

One of the first theologians to address the issue seriously was Paul Ramsey of Princeton, who in his book, "The Fabricated Man," urged a prohibition on cloning experiments as well as all other kinds of test-tube experimentation on human embryos.

"In the case of cloning a man," Ramsey declared, "the question is what to do with the mishaps, whether discovered in the course of extracorporeal gestation in the laboratory or by monitored uterine gestation. In case a monstrosity — a subhuman or parahuman individual — results, shall the experiment simply be stopped and this artfully created human life killed?"

To be sure, most religious bodies have not yet taken stands on cloning, although it is expected that this will change as the implications of the biological revolution — from test-tube babies to genetic engineering — takes hold. One place where considerable research into some of these implications has been under way is at the Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research Center in St. Louis, headed by Father William Gallagher.

Father Albert Moraczewski, the center's vice president and a former professor at the Baylor School of Medicine in Waco, Tex., says that it would seem that cloning would run into the same moral difficulties as in vitro fertilization, which he also opposes.

"Is this a morally acceptable

way of producing human beings?" he asks. "When God gave man dominion over the earth, did that dominion include the possibility of making a radical change in man himself or in the way he is reproduced? I think the provisional answer is that we don't have that authority."

The priest said there is an "integrity to the human body" that morally precludes any kind of operations other than those aimed at correcting existing malfunctions. "You cannot willy nilly cut off a finger if there is nothing wrong with that finger."

One additional problem with cloning, he said, is that the "product" of these experiments would have to be assumed to be a human person.

"Suppose you were a clone. To say that someone else should have access to your liver, or any other part of your body — why, that would reduce you as a person to a thing."

Dr. Sumner B. Twiss, Jr., a professor of religious studies at Brown University and a member of the university's biomedical ethics program, noted, on the positive side, the argument of some that clones would be yet another alternative for couples desiring children. Others have said that people with certain desirable characteristics could be duplicated so that their clones could be sent on special "missions."

Other positive arguments, he said, include using clones to test the effects of various chemicals on the body, and to prevent a "deterioration" of the gene pool.

Worrisome, however, is that the attempt to duplicate people with certain "desirable" characteristics could start people thinking anew in terms of positive eugenics and the creation of a "master race," the same ideas that captivated Hitler.

Dr. Joseph Stanton, a clinical professor of medicine at Tufts University in Boston, also sees the need for an airing on the issue. But the physician, a director of the Massachusetts Value of Life Committee who testified against the opening of a test-tube baby clinic last year in Norfolk, Va., faults the religious community for leaving these questions up to the government and to other members of the medical and

scientific professions.

Although he doesn't see himself as "anti-science," he contends that many in his profession have become corrupted to the point where many have become accustomed to destroying rather than protecting life.

Even Dr. Patrick Steptoe, who brought about the birth of the first test-tube baby, admitted that other human embryos were destroyed — "placed under glass slides for study," the physician charged. He said there have even been reported attempts to combine

human sperm with eggs from other mammals.

On the idea of using clones as "spare parts bins," Dr. Stanton thinks it's ghoulish. "If the world reaches that stage, let me off. By then, there would no longer be any poetry in the world, no music."

By contrast, Prof. McKinnell, the frog cloner from Minnesota, said that even though he sees the potential for human cloning, he does not think it will ever become a widespread practice. Nor does he see a need for

government regulation to control cloning experiments "unless some dingbat sets up a company somewhere offering to make you your very own clone."

"There would be no point to it," he said. "There is no biomedical reason for human cloning. There's nothing you can learn that you could not also learn with animals. And what would you have in the end? Another person. There are already four billion people in the world and I think we already know of other ways of making more that wouldn't be so costly."

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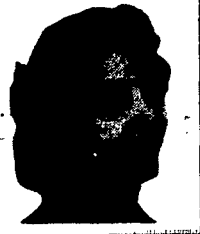
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All in the Family

Little Mysteries

Ever wonder why:

- People who enjoy describing themselves as "very private persons" usually do so in lengthy, tell-all interviews?

- People who are sick and should be home in bed instead of out in public spreading germs always brag about how they never let a

little illness keep them down?

- The actress who extols diet gelatin on TV and says she has to watch every bite because it all ends up you know where quite obviously has never weighed more than 80 pounds dripping wet?

- When your children do something less than wonderful your spouse describes them as "your kids" when they bring home straight As, make a winning goal, or

have an unexpected attack of politeness in public, they suddenly become "my kids?"

- Why you always tend to feel as if you are back in fifth grade at parent-teacher conferences (the little chairs?) and either the paddle or the dunce cap, or both, are being held in readiness?

- Why psychiatrists, plumbers, TV repairmen and some spouses often resort to esoteric language when you ask too many questions?

- Travel warnings are seldom posted when such delights as a dentist appointment or an IRS audit are on the calendar, but frequently appear when you've been invited out for a deluxe lunch or gourmet dinner?