

Catholics and Human Cloning

What is human cloning? Cloning, also known as *nuclear transplantation* or *somatic cell nuclear transfer*, is a process which can produce a genetic copy of another human being. The nucleus of a human egg is removed and replaced with the nucleus of a body cell from the individual who is to be cloned. The egg is then shocked with an electric charge, so that the nucleus directs the development of a new human being whose genetic make-up is almost identical to the original adult body cell.

How is this different from sexual reproduction?

The product of both cloning and sexual reproduction is a new human life. In sexual reproduction a sperm and an egg unite to form a new human life of *distinct* genetic make-up (fertilization). In cloning, the new life will have almost the *identical* genetic make-up of the person who provided the nucleus. But it is nonetheless a new life, developing on its own just like any other human life.

A cloned human being is a member of the species *homo sapiens*, possessing a human genetic structure and a rational nature. There is no reason to suppose that the clone would not possess the same basic human dignity as any other newly created human life.

Why clone human beings?

Cloning-for-biomedical-research (so-called 'therapeutic cloning') would use human beings at the embryonic stage for research, to test new drugs and treatments, or to obtain stem cells.

Cloning-to-produce-children (so-called 'reproductive cloning') would involve cloned embryos being implanted in a woman's womb and being born. This could allow infertile couples to have a genetically related child, or others to design a disease free embryo, make a near-perfect tissue transplant donor for an existing sick child (a donor clone), or try to replicate a loved one and reproduce individuals of great genius, talent or beauty.

'Reproductive' and 'therapeutic' cloning are different terms for the *same* process. In reproductive cloning, a new life is created and that life is allowed to mature and develop unto birth. In therapeutic cloning, a new life is created in order to destroy it and use its stem cells for research purposes.

Should we clone human beings? NO. As well as scientific reasons, there are very important ethical reasons why we should *never* clone human beings.

1. *Cloning is an assault upon the dignity of a human person.* A clone is not wanted for his or her own sake, but because he or she is 'useful' for experimentation, as a supply of cells or tissues, or as a copy of some other 'worthwhile' person.
2. *Cloning may be an attack upon the life of a human person.* The embryonic person may be killed to extract stem cells, or in the process of other biomedical research. A child who is born from cloning may suffer untold physical and psychological harm.
3. *Cloning transforms human procreation into a means of production.* Children are a gift to be unconditionally welcomed, not a product to be engineered and exploited.
4. *Cloning denies children (and society) the benefit of parental and family relationships.* Cloning could create whole classes of 'genetic orphans' whose origin is unknown, or children who have multiple - 'genetic', 'gestational' and 'adoptive' – parents.

Where can I find more information?

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_academies/acdlife/documents/rc_pa_acdlife_doc_30091997_clon_en.html Pontifical Academy for Life, "Reflections on Cloning." 1997
<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/bioethic/index.htm> & <http://www.cbhd.org/resources/cloning/>