

The Cloning Debate

Cloning is the process of creating an exact copy of the original, and recently, "cloning" refers to the replication of living humans and animals. Somatic cell nuclear transfer, as the process is called, involves removing the nucleus from an egg cell and replacing it with the nucleus from a cell of the organism to be cloned. In the past few years, advances have been made in both human and animal cloning. Scottish scientists famously cloned a sheep, and British scientists reportedly cloned a human embryo that survived for five days. Cloning is an extremely controversial subject that forces society to examine the proper limits of man's control over life.

In 1997, Scottish scientists famously produced a female sheep, "Dolly," using the process of reproductive cloning. Since that time, other scientists have cloned other species, including cows and rabbits. Most recently, scientists are attempting to reproduce humans through cloning. President Bush and the Republican party are strongly in opposition to human cloning. Conservatives tend to believe that life is a creation, "not a commodity," and that human cloning would have a disastrous impact on the American moral fabric. In 2002, Congress introduced a bill that would ban human cloning in all forms, imposing a prison sentence and multi-million dollar fine on anyone who attempted human cloning. (The Ban on Human Cloning Act has yet to be passed.)

There are practical considerations to the cloning debate, as well. Most medical experts believe that reproductive human cloning would not produce a health newborn. Indeed, many scientists predict that cloning would produce harmful abnormalities in a baby's genes. Many scientists and medical practitioners welcome the advance of cloning for individual human cells. This process, called therapeutic cloning, adopts the concept of cloning on a micro scale, to help regenerate broken or diseased body parts. Some politicians, such as Republican Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, support the idea of therapeutic cloning.

Critics of therapeutic cloning argue that the process should be prohibited, no matter how beneficial the practical applications may turn out to be. The most vocal critics of therapeutic cloning, mainly from religious communities, argue that the destruction of human life, even on cellular level, is a moral offense. These cells form the beginning of human life, and humans do not have the right to destroy life in order to create life. The creation of life, they argue, should be left to God.

The cloning debate lends itself to larger questions, including: Is it immoral to recreate life artificially? Does human life really begin at the cellular level? Should the government interfere with scientific advances that could benefit millions of people?

About the Author

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