

Identity of Human Clones

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This question of identity is connected with one of the oldest areas of thought in philosophy, which go back to the origins of humanity. It is the search for the origin of humanity, mind and soul and by this also the search for the meaning and definition of life. Many question can be asked, like what makes one a person? What makes a human human? What differs us from the animals and what differs us among each other? What makes us special in the universe? What is the origin of our mind and what shapes our soul? What makes us individual and unique? All these question are as old as philosophy as such and many philosophers in all ages have tried to give answers to some or all of these questions and some only added other questions. But whatever the answers might have been in the past, they all need new reflection against the new background of genetics and the rising possibility of cloned humans.

Genetics and genetic engineering are seen by many people today as a tool with which mankind will manage to deal with most of the major problems of this planet, as famine or all kind of serious diseases. But almost as many peoples seem to doom the genetic engineering as a interference with nature which will cause more problems than benefits and maybe jeopardize human wealth and health by dealing with powers, science is not able to fully understand and control. But regardless if one sees genetics as merely tool to lead mankind to a glorious new future without hunger or disease, or if one perceives genetics as a kind of Pandoras box, that should better be kept closed for our own safety, it is obvious that the mere possibilities arising from genetics are so powerful, that they call not only for close empirical scientific but also for ethical and philosophical examination.

And the very kind of genetics, that seems to have the deepest implications on humanity is cloning. So, even if today's general cloning technologies are still in their infant shoes, human cloning and research in this area is already forbidden in some countries. But

nonetheless the path to human cloning seems to be laid, following the old proverb that what is possible will be done.

But what does cloning exactly mean? Cloning in general is explained to or understood by many people as basically making a genetic copy of something. This might be copying just one cell, but it could also be a mass of cells, or even a functioning system of interacting cells (organism), like an organ or a whole animal. Or even a human. The question is know, is there any difference between the copy and the original? And if, what is it?

Since Dolly, the first mammal cloned by Scottish scientists in July 1996 cloning is a topic of interest not only for scientists and philosophers, but is also resounded throughout the land and the interest in its implications is even increasing. Of which importance and interests the topic of cloning is seems also to be shown by the increasing coverage of the topic in media, especially in books and movies. Well known titles like “Jurassic Park” (1993) from Stephen Spielberg based on the homonymous bestseller novel by Michael Crichton (cf. <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0107290/>; 15/12/2005), Chris Columbus adaptation of the short story by Isaac Asimov “Bicenntenial Man” (1999) starring Robin Williams (cf. <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0182789/>; 15/12/2005), “The Sixth Day” (2000) starring Arnold Schwarzenegger (cf. <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0216216/>; 15/12/2005), the dramatic thriller “Godsend” (2004) with Robert DeNiro (cf. <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0335121/>; 18/12/2005) or the recent blockbuster “The Island” (2005) with Ewan McGregor (cf. <http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0399201/>; 15/12/2005) bring the philosophic aspects of cloning, so of course mixed either with a good portion of action, tension and/or humor, to a broad audience.

In some science fiction movies and novels clones share often a common faith referring to their existence as copies. With each copy one part of the original faints. So clons from clons will ultimately fail to be able to exist. All in all, clones are often assumed to have a much shorter life expectation due to the cloning process. This arises from the copying process of the DNA, which can not be used indefinitely. So when Dolly the first cloned mammal died in February 2003 after roughly 6 1/2 years , she was not lucky either, cause the average life expectany of sheep is 13-15 years. But what is of interest from the philosophical point of view is not life expectations, enhanced body capabilites or possible resistences to certain diseases. What is the philosophical point of interest is the question, if and when human life begins in

the case of cloning and if and when the clone is a individual and distinct human being and posses some kind of soul or essence.

In order to gain some answers to these questions one should first try to answer the question if a clone is really a human, or, to formulate it from a platonic point of view, one should ask, what is the “whatness” of a clone. Is the essence of a cloned human “humaness” or “cloneness”? At the first sight one may be tempted to say that of course a clone is a human, because he would look like one. But is the physical appereance the crucial and decisive attribute that determines the essence? Does a human loose some part of his humanessess if he looses some part of his body? According to Plato he does not, because matter is just pure nothingness. But if humaness is not depending on the physical shape, then one might say that on the contrary physical shape does not determine humaness. In Plato the differences between two kinds of “whatnesses” can be broken down to the quantitative differences of their included goodness and beauty. The mere physical identity of clones and humans does not proof the identity of their essences. But what may make the “whatnesses” alike is the ability to grasp the totality of beauty and goodness, because this is, following Plato, only possible for a human intellect. If a clone would grasp the totality of beauty and goodnees this would constitute his humaness. But what is intersesting in this case is, that the platonic ideas of goodness and beauty are somehow outside of humanity, because they can not be achieved in totality, at least not by a single human. The ideas are to perfect, they exist in “heaven” and are more a goal. By creating a clone who is more than a mere copy of his original, and is genetically enhanced and optimized in order to free the clone from all human weaknesses he is in such a way genetically improved that he is supposed to reach the idea of a perfect human. This perfect human may than reach the totality of goodness and beauty. By this one may argue that such cloneness is a kind of super-humaness.

Following Aristotelean philosophy men are only born as potential men and only become actual men by growing up. Aristotle calls this process, in which a potential energy is set free and grows Dynamis. The sexual act between actual man and woman, which Aristotle refers to as Energeia, or actual energy, unblocks the Dynamis, which is already slumbering in the germ. One may now easily transfer the concept of Energeia from the sexual act to the artificial fertilization in a lab and would agree that both resamples an action which set loose

the potential energy of the cells. By this the clone would get his opportunity to grow up to an actual man. A grown up human, whose Dynamis was intiliazed by natural fertilization and a grown up clone, whose Dynamis was initialized by artifical fertilization would therefore both be considered as actual men.

But the Aristotelean concept of movement and potential energy is not unquestioned. For example in Descarte's philosophy the Aristotelean system of Dynamis os replaced by a system of mechanical movement, which is free of any inner essence or aim, but therefore can be grasped by mathematical equations. By this he destroys the theory of humanity mentioned above, but luckily he delivers an other method , the method of doubting. Descartes stresses that one can know is the content of ones mind and that one sensory inputs can not be trusted. Only in the self-reflection doubting one can proof his existence. Because one knows that one doubts one exists ("I think therefore I am")¹. One should now not hesitate to accept, that any entity who would be capable of following and maybe eve nexpressing this line of thought may be considered human. So any clone capale of this would be human.

As it is discussed above, there can be found some methods of thought which would lead to the result of putting humans and clones on the same level of existence. But even if one agrees on that, that a clone posseses as much "humaness" as the original human, there remains the question, if the clone is also an individual person. The idea of modern individualism arose from the reformation processes in the 14th century first vaguely formulated by Wyclif or Huss and much later further developed by Calvin. Individualism is today connected with problems like solitude, narcissism, or the claims of the individuum versus the claims of the society. But as most of our societiy think now in individualistic terms, an not longer in the terms of the wealth of a society (like the Polis in ancient Greek philosophy) it seems of importance to determine if a clone would present a individual person or just a replica of his original.

When it comes to natural copies, which might be envisaged in twins, no one has ever questioned that these twins represent individual persons. In literature there even exist a concept of "evil twin" and "good twin", as if the good and evil parts of one single soul or mind would have seperated in two persons, which definitely would support the point of view of individual persons. On the other hand many stories exist about twins, who actually seem to think and feel alike, even they may be thousands of miles away from each other or may not

¹ This method was derived from Descartes from the Aristotelian concept of self-thinking of God and transfered to the human mind.

even ever met each other. But is it helpful to compare clones and twins? Again here a physical match might lead to false assumptions.

One may not judge the individuality of an entity by its appearance, because individuality is not a status or condition but a character. And a character can only be judged by observing behaviour. Following Rousseau all individuals have in common, that their actions are orientated towards personal benefit. But such behaviour is quite difficult to judge from the outside. It can not be truly differentiated between an action that aims to personal interests and an action that only accidentally benefits the personal interests. Also one may not easily judge what the personal interests of another person are, so one may not easily judge if the action of a person is aiming towards his personal interests. It is indeed possible that any observed action is not at all driven by the aim of pursuing personal interest. For example the instinct of self preservation leads to actions that seem to be definitely in the interest of a entity. But it is not a conscious decision, it is an instinct and may even lead to actions that do more harm than help. If a injured animal tries to escape from a man who intends to help it and hurts itself even more by this escaping action, one would not judge that this is conscious decision which aims to personal interests. So it may be a decision made on wrong information or miscommunication. Nevertheless one would never judge an entity, which is only driven by instincts, as an individual. The only way to recognise an individual is to observe it taking an action that would clearly violate its personal interests. Any entity that takes any action of that kind, for example to put itself at risk in order to save others or to help the interest of another entity (for example the society [polis]), can be recognised as individual. Any conscious decision that violates personal interests is the proof of individuality. If a clone is now behaving in such manner that is described above this would be the proof that he is a true individual, despite any similarities or even identities to his human original.

Now, as it can be said that clones may be humans and also that clones may be individuals, there is still one question left. Does a clone possess a soul? One can be sure, that different religions would give different answers to this question. The Roman Catholic point of view is such. It is believed, that the soul enters the body at the very moment of its conception, when during sexual contact female eggs and male sperms merge. To interfere in this sexual process by extracting female eggs and fertilize them by technical means is against God's will. Therefore Roman Catholic church states, that cloned embryos do not have a soul, because the clones are created outside of God's parameters. But of course one may question this point of view. One may for example say, that a clone can only be created from some original part of a

human, who does possess a soul. So as a soul can not be measured or divided it has to expand itself to the new being, the clone. But one may also say, that a soul is not part of the human body and can therefore not be expanded by using it. An additional thought might be, that if god has created humans in such a way, that they are able to create new life by other means than natural reproduction, this would mean that this other means are also part of God's will. And moreover, if one assumes, that a clone possesses a free will like any other human, he may be able to believe in a God. And how can he believe in a God if he misses the necessary soul to do so? Also a Pantheistic point of view can be taken, where God is not a creator outside the world, but exists in every part of the world. Here again, a clone would be a result of other parts of the world and would be himself part of the world, which includes God and therefore the clone must also be assumed to include God or a soul.

One can see by all the thoughts above that there are various possible points of view on clones and their identity. It is important to see that how we will perceive clones will determine how we will treat them. If clones are seen as non-human than they belong to the kind of the animals, which in our day are totally enslaved by men and seen only as living tools. But if they are perceived as human, than they would share all rights and duties which our societies lay on human beings today.