

## **Moral Complications of Cloning**

Kenneth J. Coughlan

July 11, 2020

As Francis J. Beckwith explains, there are two types of cloning scientists use to clone organisms. The first is embryo cloning. To use this method a scientist first fertilizes an ovum with a sperm in a petri dish. Once the zygote divides in two, he removes the zona pellucida (which contains enzymes necessary for cell division), separates the two cells, then recoats them with an artificial zona pellucida to allow them to each continue to develop, much like identical twins develop in a mother's body (Beckwith 2007, 206). The second type of cloning is somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT). This method involves removing the nucleus of a cell, fusing it with an ovum that has also had its nucleus removed, then utilizing electric stimulation on the resulting entity (Ibid., 206-07).

While cloning could have significant potential uses in scientific research (for example in the extraction of embryonic stem cells), it is inextricably identified with significant moral problems. Creating a clone in order to extract its stem cells, for instance, requires killing the cloned organism. If the organism has value by nature of the sort of being it is (and not through the development of particular biological functions) then killing it at any stage after it is created is the moral equivalent of killing a toddler or an adult. Most people would likely agree that it is not morally permissible to kill an adult human in order to extract biological material from it, even if that biological material could be used to make substantial scientific advances.

Cloning, whether for stem cell research, to develop organs that can save an already existing person, or for other similar reasons, also carries with it the unsettling implication of viewing human beings as commodities. As Beckwith explains, "Commodities stand in an object-subject relation to their owners and/or their makers ... On the other hand, moral agents stand in a subject-subject relation to other moral agents" (Ibid., 214). Creating life for the purpose of

using that life to achieve some other end (whether it be scientific or to create offspring with desired characteristics) is to treat that life as merely a means to an end rather than an end in itself. That is the nature of commodities and seems at odds with our moral responsibilities toward other living agents.

#### REFERENCES

Beckwith, Francis J. 2007. *Defending Life: A Moral and Legal Case Against Abortion Choice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.