

## If human beings can be cloned

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### POINTS TO DEVELOP

Cloning animals not new, but cloning human beings fraught with ethic problems

Advantages

Objections.

Summing up.

Cloning is not something new. Mammals have usually been cloned by nuclear transfer technique which involves fusion of a donor cell and an egg cell. Until now, this fusion was possible only when the donor cell was taken directly from an embryo and not from an older cell. However, Dr Ian Wilmut and his colleagues at the Roslin Institute in Scotland achieved a breakthrough in cloning by using an adult cell. By using an adult cell, the team proved that even cells that have already differentiated and become specialised, do not forget the genetic instructions to create an entire organism. It is this development that has generated a lot of controversy. Dr Wilmut has pointed out at the possibility of cloning human beings in a similar fashion, i.e., producing not two identical children but a child identical to the parent. Although this possibility is remote at present, it does exist, raising a plethora of moral, social, cultural and economic, apart from scientific, questions.

If human beings can be cloned, then the technique can be used to recover a loved one who is no more. In cases of infertility, a person can give his/her own cells to give birth to a clone. There are many who see human cloning as an attempt to improve the human race. Scientists argue that cloning may be used to study genetic diseases. It could also be used in human beings to treat diseases by replacing diseased parts.

However, sceptics regard cloning to be a dangerous technology-a technology that would threaten the very foundation of human civilization. Since it involves genes from a single parent, concepts of parenthood, family and society would undergo tremendous change. Such an order of things would be beneficial neither for the parent nor the child.

Cloning is a departure from the natural order of things: it is deliberate and artificial since it involves asexual reproduction and asexual lineages of species have not lasted long. There is also a fear that human cloning might result in

ethnic cleansing as the technique could be used to propagate one species at the cost of another. In other words, if misused, the technique could lead to the unfolding of man's commercial potential in the face of a new technique.

The UNESCO has declared that practices which are contrary to human dignity such as reproductive cloning of human beings shall not be permitted. The National Bioethics Advisory Commission of the USA called for a ban on cloning experiments. The Pope declared that each human being has a right to a unique human genome. The European Union has also adopted a ban on human cloning.

Dolly the sheep cloned by Dr Wilmut and his colleagues was born after 277 attempts, of which only 29 of the fused udder cells actually became embryos, which were implanted in 13 ewes of which one became pregnant and gave birth. In the much more complex human system, the odds of success are much lower, making human cloning an event of the far future.

No view can be absolute. It would be highly impractical to completely ignore the benefits of the new technology and overemphasise ethical issues. In fact, several techniques which had a moral tag attached to them have in the long run proved beneficial to mankind. Most of the scientists are deeply concerned that laws prohibiting human cloning will stifle important research. James Watson, the Nobel laureate, called for a halt to the abuses of cloning human beings rather than stopping research associated with it. The question ultimately is that if human beings can be cloned, then how do we ensure that the power of this technology is not abused for selfish gains by a few. A reasonable legislation to prevent unscrupulous use of the technology would -be the first step towards ensuring human benefit. If the ill-effects of human cloning can be guarded in some way, the idea of further research on the issue might not be bad at all.

Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of human cloning, the odds of success are quite low. The new technology would make human reproduction into a customized, mass production of identical human beings, assuring better quality and a degree of design predictability, long associated with industrial production. Human cloning would certainly make life more mechanical as opposed to the organic.