Author's response to reviews

Title: Human Cloning Laws, Human Dignity and the Poverty of the Policy Making Dialogue

Authors:

Prof Timothy A Caulfield (caulflfd@law.ualberta.ca)

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PDF covering letter
Dear Editor:

**Human Cloning Laws, Human Dignity and the Poverty of the Policy Making Dialogue**

Thank you for providing me with the reviewers’ comments and the opportunity to submit a revised manuscript. I would also like to thank both reviewers for the tremendously thoughtful and helpful comments. Their analysis and suggestions have, I believe, strengthened and focussed the paper.

**Response to Reviewers:**
Though there is a good deal of overlap between the reviewers’ comments, I will go through each of the comments separately.

**Schafer:**
All of Prof Schafer’s comments are discretionary and are offered merely for consideration. Nevertheless, I found them all to be both helpful and interesting and, as such, will address each below.

1) Both reviewers have suggested that I attempt to define human dignity. Indeed, many of the comments flow from this observation. The goal of the short paper is not to define this slippery concept (that would be a much different piece), but to argue that existing analysis is wanting and that, regardless of the definition, legitimate counter arguments exist. Therefore, to address this concern I have done two things: 1) I have re-written the introduction to clarify the purpose of the paper, recognize that many definitions exist (and note that I don’t provide my own definition), and provide the reader with references to authors who have made the attempt (references 5-8); and 2) I have attempted “to divine the likely definition of human dignity at play in the context of a given social concern” (from new intro). I believe that this approach effectively addresses most of the reviewers’ concerns. This will be further explored below.

2) Professor Schafer urges me to take on the more ambitious goal of providing a conclusion regarding human dignity and reproductive cloning. While an interesting suggestion, I believe, again, that would be a very different paper and would deflect from the central theme of this paper. I have, however, added a line in the intro to alert the reader to my more focussed goal.

3) (i) I do not mean to imply a certain personal view about the role of “uniqueness” to human dignity. Rather, I mean to state that even if you believe “uniqueness” is key, there are interesting counter arguments. In order to make this point clearer, I have added to and modified the section (note, this was also in response to a number of Pullman’s comments). For example, I now highlight the likely definition of dignity at play in this context and argue that it is difficult to see how a given “uniqueness” view of dignity is infringed by reproductive cloning. For example, I
have added the following: “Without resolving the point, let us assume that, somehow, uniqueness is central to an individual’s dignity. We must ask, then, what role our genome has in our uniqueness and, more to the point, why copying it infringes human dignity. Our genome plays a key role in how we develop, but it is hardly determinative of who we are as individuals.”

ii) In fact, I am not trying to endorse any particular view of determinism. Rather, I merely seek to point out that some commentators concerns seem to be linked to the fallacy of genetic determinism. That said, I have attempted to clarify this section.

iii) I offer these quotes as mere examples of other perspectives. The intro sentence was modified slightly to highlight this point.

iv) noted and agree. However, I think it is fair to say, that the popular summary is “as an end, not as a means.”

v) I am not saying that this is my view. Rather, I am saying that this must be the view of those who hold this concern (again, I agree with Schafer’s conclusion).

vi) An interesting comment. I have taken this as a mere observation.

vii) I agree and have made the following edit: “....if he/she is treated as an equal member of the community, as an autonomous individual and with respect, is the individual’s dignity still infringed?”

viii) agree

ix) Agree. I have made several small edits and added a reference (i.e., “That said, there are those who take a more expansive, less Western centric, view of dignity, suggesting, for instance, that dignity is also relevant to the way in ‘which groups visualize and constitute themselves.’”).

x) I do not mean to imply that this is necessarily the definitive view. That is a quote from the President’s Council on Bioethics. I go onto criticize the view (albeit on difference grounds).

xi) I believe that it is fairly clear, through the Dworkin quote, that some seem to believe that cloning is “playing God” and is therefore against human dignity

4) I take this to be merely a kind editorial comment.

5) This is a valid point and, in fact, it was one that I was aware of while writing the article. However, I felt that the point is more powerful if left to the reader to struggle with. I meant to leave the reader with an interesting implied question (e.g., should we, therefore, criminally ban IVF?). Since this wasn’t clear to Schafer, I have added the following: “Of course, one could argue that, for the sake of consistency, these latter activities should also be banned. However, monitoring and assessing the motives of perspective parents hardly seems like a practical or appropriate state policy.”

Pullman:

Again, most of these suggestions are discretionary. And, again, I found them very useful. I will comment on them all (though many are covered by my responses to Shafer).

1) I believe that I have addressed much of this suggestion in #1 above. For example, I have also added several references to authors that have attempted to define dignity in a variety of context. It should also be noted, however, that my first version of the paper already referenced a broad range of scholarship (e.g., many of my references fall outside the cloning debate).

2) Again, this comment is addressed in #1 above. For example, I try to explain the likely “operational definition” of dignity at play in the listed concern.

3) I don’t dispute this point. But unlike the process of slavery, it is unclear how the process of cloning infringes human dignity (as I state in the article “as aside from religious arguments regarding
the moral status of the embryo and the significance of sexual union, there seems to be little to support the notion that “replication” infringes human dignity”). The mere assertion that it does is obviously insufficient. Also, I made a small edit to highlight that I am asking if the individual’s dignity is “still” being infringed.

4) I agree with Professor Pullman’s comment. Indeed, I think my concluding sentence was a bit of a distracting aside. As such, I have deleted it.

5) Professor Pullman also feels that I need to be more explicit about the normative value of notion of human dignity. In fact, I feel that my point is fairly clear. As I have stated above, I don’t mean (at least in this article) to define dignity and provide a definitive description of its role (I don’t think I could comment on its normative value without also providing a definition). Rather, I place that task on the policy makers and commentators who use the concept to justify regulatory policy (clearly the onus lies on those making the assertion). My entire conclusion is devoted to this point. To some degree, it is irrelevant what I think about its value. Thanks to the reviewers’ suggestions, I think that narrow focus in more clearly explained in this version. Those who wish to use it as a normative value must provide better analysis and meet the noted counter arguments.

Finally, though I appreciate that almost all the reviewers’ suggestions are discretionary and are kindly provided to strengthen the piece, I hope they both realize that this paper is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of these complex issues (a point that I make several times throughout the article). Rather, I seek to highlight the issues in order to encourage more thorough policy analysis. This is particularly so of the “Discussion” section (which seems to be the focus of both reviewers’ comments) where I provide the reader with a mere sampling of concerns and counter arguments.