

## Is It Ethical to Clone Animals?

***"If animal cloning becomes widespread, as seems likely, it may have the subtle effect of shifting our attitudes and perceptions towards the animal kingdom."***



The global market for cloning cats, dogs, and other pets reached \$300 million in 2024, and has been projected to reach \$1.5 billion by 2035.

When it comes to the ethics of cloning animals, whether cattle, racehorses, dogs or cats, it is important to inquire if a “proportionately serious reason” exists for doing the procedure, since the process can cause physical and genetic defects of varying severity in cloned animals.

Cloned mice, for example, have aberrant patterns of gene expression in multiple genes, and cloned animals have elevated rates of unexplained gestational or postnatal deaths, as well as anomalies like enlarged hearts or abnormal lungs.

Because cloning involves the bringing together of two remnants of heavily damaged cells — an extracted nucleus from a body cell, plus an egg that has been deprived of its nucleus — it should come as no surprise that these two conjoined elements may have difficulty cooperating and communicating with each other to produce a presentable member of the species.

It is also conceivable that a cloned animal could give rise to a dangerous genetic variation, by making the individual animal, for example, more violent. Even in the absence of such outcomes, regularly described in science fiction, it is still

noteworthy that genetic variability and the long-term viability of animal populations, particularly small populations of endangered species, could be affected by extensive animal cloning. Decreasing diversity through cloning could make populations more susceptible to disease and environmental changes, impacting sensitive ecosystems and conservation efforts.

Even with the risks of cloning, we can envision situations where a “proportionately serious reason” would exist for attempting to clone animals. A German shepherd, for example, that is exceptionally skilled at sniffing out illegal drugs or other contraband, might be cloned to expand the availability of “super-olfactory canines” for police departments around the country.

If a famous Hollywood celebrity loses his or her beloved Fido to cancer, however, we can validly debate whether a strong attachment to the departed canine constitutes a sufficiently serious reason for embarking on a cloning project with a price tag of fifty or sixty thousand dollars. A generated dog clone will always be an imperfect copy of Fido, and will often have a very different personality from the original animal.

When actress Barbra Streisand lost her beloved 14-year-old Samantha, she cloned two replicas. She commented that they had “different personalities... I’m waiting for

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them to get older so I can see if they have her brown eyes and her seriousness.” Later, a somewhat disappointed Streisand remarked, “You can clone the look of a dog, but you can’t clone the soul.”

Given that canines hold a primary position in the animal world as “man’s best friend,” it should not be difficult to find another furry friend, perhaps one waiting to be rescued from a local shelter, who can serve as a new member of the family and once again pull at their owner’s heart-strings.

While animal cloning can sometimes be a reasonable choice, and ethically justifiable, the Catholic Church teaches definitively that the cloning of human beings is morally unacceptable. This conclusion arises from the recognition that human persons, unlike non-human animals, are created in God’s image and likeness, which implies an essential obligation that human procreation and the transmission of human life happen exclusively within marriage through the marital act of spouses.

As we consider animal cloning and other novel biomedical developments of recent years, we face important ethical questions about how best to exercise our limited dominion over the earth, including the animal

kingdom. Our dominion is not an absolute right of domination over God’s creation. Instead, we are called to use reasonably, and avoid abusing, the powers we have received.

Exercising proper stewardship over animals ought to be a balanced part of a broader concern of avoiding exploitation of the vulnerable, as we try to be respectful of the given order of creation.

Cloning technology can have useful applications in animal husbandry, helping to generate stock animals that are more resistant to disease or that have a higher productivity rate. Researchers can engineer and clone dairy cows, for example, to produce an improved quantity of milk or better quality meat.

But if animal cloning becomes widespread, as seems likely, it may have the subtle effect of shifting our attitudes and perceptions towards the animal kingdom.

By routinely cloning animals, they may come to be seen as little more than “manipulable quantities” or “raw material” for our domination — less as animals, and more as artifacts or objects. We need to be attentive to the prospect of reducing animals, including cloned animals, to market-driven technological commodities, cobbled together under the

impetus of unrestrained profit-seeking.

So while the cloning of non-human animals is generally permissible when proportionately serious reasons exist, we must also remain attentive to the broader social and environmental implications. The responsible use of the technology requires us to weigh carefully its scientific potential against the duty to avoid causing unnecessary suffering to animals or risks to their populations.

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