

Chapter 8

United States: The Case for Cloning

Valerie and Michael O’Sullivan have been married for ten years. They were high school sweethearts from Oakland, California, who married after they graduated from Stanford University. As financial analysts, they lead busy and challenging lives in San Francisco. During their vacations, they enjoy traveling to archeological sites in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Their marriage is a happy one, with one exception: they have not been able to have children, which has been a deep disappointment, not only to them but also to their parents, who long for grandchildren. In the past five years Valerie and Michael have gone to several different doctors, none of whom have identified the cause of their infertility. Michael and Valerie have been thinking of adoption lately because of their discouragement about having a biological child of their own, but Valerie is not convinced that adoption is the best alternative for them. She can’t stop hoping for some kind of miracle.

Last night Valerie read an article in the San Francisco *Chronicle* that described the first baby to be born as a result of an experimental cloning project in Italy. The article was somewhat unclear as to exactly how the cloning had been done, but the San Francisco doctor who took responsibility for the amazing development said that several more cloned babies would soon be born elsewhere in Europe. After Valerie read the article, she became excited. “Michael,” she said, “why don’t we give this doctor a call and see if we would be accepted into his experimental program. You know we’ve always wanted to have a son—and he would look like you—tall and handsome.”

Michael was unenthusiastic about Valerie’s suggestion. “Forget it, Valerie. This whole cloning thing is really not a good idea, not to mention that it’s probably illegal. What about the ethics involved? And if I understand the process, you want the baby to develop from my cells, so it would be an exact copy of me, and that just isn’t right. I think we should consider adoption and not get into playing God. And there are sure to be medical complications in a procedure as new as this one. It’s not the way for us to have a baby—it’s way too dangerous.”

Valerie was upset because she thought Michael was being narrow minded and old fashioned. She knew that of the two of them, she was the risk taker, and Michael was the cautious one. However, in her opinion, there could be nothing wrong with taking part in a medically supervised experiment that might lead to their greatest hope and dream: a baby of their own. She decided to call the doctor and make an appointment, even if Michael was not supportive. He would probably come around eventually when he realized how wonderful this would be for both of them. She could almost imagine the joy she would feel holding a tiny replica of Michael in her arms.

The following week, Valerie met Dr. Edgar Bellino, who was a reassuring and friendly physician with many years of experience in the field of medical research. He projected an air of confidence and success. Dr. Bellino told Valerie that he was in a partnership

with a well-known scientist in Italy, Dr. Salvatore De Luca, who had been one of the first to experiment with human cloning. Their private clinic in Rome, Italy, was the headquarters for their research because of legal restrictions in the United States.

After a physical examination, Dr. Bellino said that Valerie appeared to be an excellent candidate for his program and asked that she make another appointment and bring her husband so the three of them could discuss the possibility of cloning for the O'Sullivans. Dr. Bellino explained that all applicants have to meet with a panel of medical experts, including a consultant in bioethics, for an interview before being accepted into the program. Furthermore, they would be expected to have an understanding of the ethical issues involved, sign a legal document of consent, and travel to Italy for the procedure.

Later that night, when Valerie told Michael about her visit to Dr. Bellino, Michael exploded in anger. "You must be desperate. I will not go along with this craziness, not now and not ever," he said resolutely. "How would I explain this to my parents, who are never going to accept such an idea? How would we explain it to the child, when he asks why he looks exactly like me? How could we live with this kind of manipulation of human life? I do not want to discuss this ever again." Michael stormed out of the room and slammed the door. He was asleep when Valerie finally came to bed.

Valerie had trouble sleeping that night, and the next morning Michael was not his usual good-natured self. After he left for his office, Valerie called Michael's parents, Arthur and Grace, and said she might drop by after work for a chat about something important to all of them. But when it was time to leave work, she reconsidered her impulse to visit Arthur and Grace and decided to stay late at the office. She could not get up her courage to face these deeply religious people and tell them what she had been thinking of doing. It was easy to predict what their reaction would be. Little by little, Valerie was beginning to give up on her desire to have a baby by cloning. Such a medical experiment might become acceptable in the future, but maybe it was just too controversial for Michael and her to undertake now.

Then again, perhaps she could try talking to Michael one more time and give him scientific information that would calm his fears and allay his concerns. She had generally been able to convince Michael of her point of view on other critical issues in the past. Trained in analytical thinking, he was open-minded and receptive to a logical approach. Valerie began to plan her argument carefully. And then she had one more idea: maybe she could invite Dr. Bellino to join them for the discussion. He could simplify the complexities of the process and might persuade Michael to change his mind. For the first time in a week, Valerie began to feel hopeful. She certainly was an ethical person who believed in God and lived according to spiritual values, and she could see nothing in cloning that contradicted her ethical and religious beliefs. Throughout history, people had been skeptical about medical advances and only accepted them with the passing of time. Cloning would probably be just one of many ways to have a baby in another 50 years. Why shouldn't she give it a try?

Discussion

1. Explain the difference between therapeutic (research) cloning and human (reproductive) cloning.
2. What factors would medical ethicists consider when deciding whether cloning is acceptable?
3. What are the arguments in favor of human cloning?
4. What are the arguments against human cloning?
5. What arguments could the doctor make to convince Michael that cloning is acceptable and safe?
6. Should Michael and Valerie attempt to have a baby through cloning?
7. What alternatives do Michael and Valerie have if they want a baby?

Case Study Report

I. Statement of the problem

A. Definition

A. Analysis

II. Suggestions of possible solutions

- A.
- B.
- C.
- D.

III. Evaluation of possible solutions

- A. Advantages
- B. Disadvantages

IV. Selection of a solution

- A. Choice
- B. Justification