

CLONING AND SOULS

So far, cattle, mice, sheep and other animals have been cloned with mixed success. Some animals have displayed defects later in life and scientists fear the same could happen with cloned human beings. Scientists do not understand what has caused those problems and that is a clear warning that it should not be done with human beings. President Bush has asked Congress to ban the creation of cloned babies as well as the cloning of human embryos for medical research. The U.S. House of Representatives passed a ban, but a similar bill in the Senate stalled after scientists argued such a law would hinder medical advances. The Vatican's top moral theologian, Father Gino Concetti, also condemned the correctness of human cloning in a recent interview.

Sometimes Christian people ask whether a human being that is cloned from another has a soul. This raises the related question precisely what a soul is. Some think that only human beings have souls. Some complicate the issue by linking two other concepts, the immortality of the soul and the need for the souls of human beings, which are sinful, to be redeemed, which might imply that animals too need redemption.

The words for "soul" both in Hebrew and in Greek also mean life, physical life, distinct from spiritual life and eternal life. The Hebrew "nephesh" means both soul and life, and the Greek "psyche" means both soul and life. The other chief words that are often used for spiritual and eternal life, Hebrew "chayyin" and Greek "zoe", also have related verbs, meaning "to live". Another Hebrew word, "neshamah" means "mind", "soul" or "breath."

Probably the best answer to the question "What is a soul?" is simply that it is a person's real living self. If I think, it is my soul that thinks.

The use of the word in Revelation is interesting. It speaks, for example, of souls without bodies. "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony that they used to hold" (Rev 6:9). John wrote, "I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their witness to Jesus and because of the Word of God. I also saw those who had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his brand on their foreheads or on their hands. They began to live and began to reign with Christ for a thousand years" (20:4). In Revelation 20 the "thousand years" (10 x 10 x 10) is best understood of the period of the New Testament, distinct from the short time of trouble just before the end. John is speaking of individual living persons before they have been reunited to their bodies in the general resurrection at the last day.

The question of soul and its relation to spirit is also difficult. In some contexts they seem interchangeable. Often the term "spirit" refers to a human being in so far as he is spiritual, contrasting with flesh or sinful human nature. Unbelievers are unspiritual, although they also have / are souls. The question of the human makeup, whether soul and body (dichotomy) or spirit and soul and body (trichotomy) is one that the Scriptures do not answer, and so the question must remain an open one. The only passage in the New Testament where the three terms occur together is 1 Thessalonians 5: 23: "May the God of peace Himself make you completely holy, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved sound and without blame when our Lord Jesus Christ comes." Here, however, the Greek is ambiguous, because the words for "and... and" may also mean "both ... and." The translation could just as well be: "May the God of peace Himself make you completely holy, and may your spirit, both soul and body, be preserved sound and without blame when our Lord Jesus Christ comes." Obviously, Christians are spiritual, and they have both souls and bodies.

The fact that the word for "soul" is also the word for physical life should not be overlooked. Sometimes a translator does not know which to choose. For example, Matthew 16:26: "For what good will it do a person if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul / life? Or what will a person give in exchange for his soul / life?"

A related question is, "Since animals are alive (like the cloned sheep Dolly), could it be said that the principle of life in her living body is soul?" The usage of the Hebrew "nephesh" in Genesis is interesting. The first is 1:20: "God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures/ souls, and let flying creatures fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.'" The Hebrew for the flying creatures is, literally, "living soul." The second is 2:7, about the creation of Adam: "Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being / soul." This duality, of the body from the dust alive with the breath of life from God constitutes a "soul." Ecclesiastes describes death as the separation of spirit from body, and here "spirit" seems virtually synonymous with soul. "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God, who gave it" (Eccl 12:7). In Genesis 2:7 the Hebrew for "living <being>" is "living soul."

The third in Genesis is 2:19: "The LORD God had formed from the ground every beast of the field and every bird in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them. Whatever the man named each living creature/ soul, that became its name." Here the Hebrew for "living creature" is, again, "living soul." The next use of "nephesh" is 9:4: "However, you shall not eat any meat that contains its life / soul, that is, its blood." The next verse refers to human beings: "I shall certainly demand an accounting for your lifeblood [literally, "your blood with reference to your souls / lives"]. I shall demand it from every animal and from human beings." However, in 9:12 "nephesh" again means "living creature": "God also said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I am giving between Me and you, and every living being / soul that is with you, for all generations to come.'" When God put His rainbow in the sky, He told Noah and his family, "This is the sign of the covenant that I am giving between Me and you, and every living being / soul that is with you, for all generations to come" (Gen 9:12, so also v. 15-16). Both living human beings and animals are not simply said to have souls, but are called "souls."

A person may lose his life, although the believer does not lose his soul, in the sense of losing eternal salvation "Stop being afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28).

An angel told Lot's family: "Get yourselves to safety for the sake of your souls / lives!"

When Rachel was dying, it is said that "her life / soul was departing" (Gen 35:18).

When Joseph's brothers were returning from Egypt, they said, "We saw how distressed he was when he was pleading

with us for pity and we would not listen.” The Hebrew here is, literally, “the distress of his soul / life / mind.” Speaking about Benjamin, Joseph’s brothers said, “His father’s life / soul / mind is wrapped up with the lad’s life / soul” (Gen 44:30).

Sometimes the word “nephesh” is equivalent to our English word “person.” For example, it is said about Leah and her maids, “She bore these to Jacob, and they numbered sixteen souls / persons” Gen 46:18 (compare 26, 27).

To complicate the usage still further, Hebrew can use “body”, “soul” and “spirit” as a substitute for “self”, as an emphasising or as a reflexive pronoun. The Psalmist writes, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and, all my inmost being, bless His holy name!” (103:1) “My soul” means, “You here, me, with respect to my innermost being.” The parallelism between “my soul” and “all my inmost being” is noteworthy. When Jesus speaks about the impossible exchange of the world for one’s soul / life, in Matthew 16, His words come alongside “deny himself” (Mt 16:24). He continues: “wants to save his life / soul will lose it. However, whoever loses his life / soul for My sake will find it” (16:25).

Whether he, she, or it is a individual living person or animal, it would seem, “soul” could be used for it.

The Hebrew word “nephesh” sometimes means “mind.” When Abraham was bargaining for the cave at Machpelah, he said, literally, “If it is with your souls / minds”, meaning, “If you are willing” (Gen 23:8).

I am told that the DNA of identical twins is the same. We have no trouble thinking of identical twins as individual souls. By the way, although their DNA is the same, identical twins can be distinguished by fingerprints.

It must be added that confusion between “soul” and “self” in the context of death and dying must be avoided. When a person’s soul leaves in death, he does not go out of existence. His unclothed self is with the Lord (2 Cor 5:1-10).

No matter how derived, even by cloning, even if the individual living human person or animal has genes or fingerprints that are identical with those of another, it is appropriate to speak of him, her, or it, not merely as having a soul, but being a soul!

There are shorter answers. Human souls have original sin. “The soul that sins, it shall die.” In addition, no matter how much laboratory intervention has taken place that results in a human person, God has been the author of all life. Genetically, a human clone must be considered completely human, and therefore would also physically, mentally, and emotionally be human. Any aspect of man’s created being regardless of any dubious secondary cause, such as cloning, which might have brought it about, has as its primary cause the creative work of God. Even through cloning, the creative work of God can and does still give all the gifts of body, soul, reason, and senses that make up one’s person. In spite of this, the cloning of human beings is contrary to God’s plan and purpose. As an analogy, the fact that a baby is beautiful does not absolve its parents from fault if it comes into the world apart from God’s institution of marriage.