

Solveig Lena Hansen, M.A.

Summary of PhD-Project

Alterity as a cultural challenge to cloning. A reconstruction of bioethical and literary negotiations

The dissertation addresses the issue of so-called reproductive cloning, i.e. the method by which Dolly the sheep was born in Scotland. Possible consequences of applying the technique to humans were intensely debated between 1996-2006 in the fields of bioethics and law as well as in public discourses and are currently being reconsidered in view of new developments in stem cell research and gene therapy.

The project focused on the topic from an interdisciplinary perspective, i.e. bioethics in relation to cultural and gender studies. In doing so, a contextualization of bioethical judgments is unfolded; moreover, the sources are expanded. With an overview of 40 German and English novels, the issue of cloning in the 20th century is examined in a cultural comparison. In addition to this, the dissertation includes seven detailed analyses of prominent novels such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), intensively discussed texts such as Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) but also completely unexplored novels such as Hans-Ulrich Horster's *The Cloned Child Uli* [Klon-Kind Uli] (1981).

Already in the introduction of the thesis, these novels are used to situate the debate on cloning beyond a mere analysis of risks and benefits, while the cultural and social contexts of the technique are emphasized. Especially novels, which embed their protagonists both socially and emotionally, illustrate how our attitudes can be shaped towards the respective clone. First, the clone can be seen as a moral counterpart, such as another person. Second, literary scenarios often depict the clone as a heteronomous, other-directed entity on the margins of society excluded from important parts of social life. Third, the clone is often represented as being genuinely alien and monstrous and is often reduced to its origin as an asexual genetic duplication. These three types of attitudes locate the thesis' introduction in the context of otherness and alterity.

In the second chapter, the methodological basis for the reconstruction of moral beliefs is formulated. This analysis seeks to make constructions of alterity visible in the ethical debate itself, whose origin can be documented with reference to other studies, primarily historical and discourse analysis. Based on previous approaches, narrative bioethics is formulated as an approach that systematically includes literature in bioethical investigations. Since novels can be understood as scenarios that tell the situation of the (potentially) affected, they make use of a technology in a fictional context of daily life. In addition, literature is used as a methodical tool to critically reconstruct the analysis of implicit norms and moral concepts used in the bioethical debate. The literary discourse motivates the questioning of moral beliefs regarding grounds for moral action in relation to alterity. The thesis reconstructs moral beliefs not only as a basis for bioethical arguments, but also for novels as a

result of the interpretation (moral beliefs of a hypothetical author). Therefore, the concept of negotiation refers to the inter-subjective discussion of the correctness of moral beliefs in a communicative process between literature and bioethics, which thereby is open to criticism and changes in attitude. Respectively, the theoretical reference points of the thesis include discourse ethics, speech act theory and feminist approaches to epistemology and argumentation.

By analyzing the bioethical debate with the categories individuality, family and freedom of action, the next chapter analysis focuses on how the clone represents different forms of alterity in the bioethical debate. Here, not only the possibilities and limits of technical innovation but also the discursive negotiation of cultural notions of identity, kinship and agency are of relevance. Based on selected ethical positions, the study shows that the use of cloning scenarios often connects speaking about the future with moral beliefs that are directly related to the present.

This analysis is followed by two historical chapters, which illuminate the negotiation of cloning in the 20th century. The starting point is the research of Hans Spemann, director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Biology in Berlin-Dahlem from 1914 to 1919. He formulated a ›fantastic experiment‹, namely transferring the nucleus of a differentiated cell into an enucleated oocyte to observe its development - the initial idea of cloning. From here on, the technological development and the ethical debate is analyzed in Germany and the UK, taking the cultural contexts into account by means of literary overviews and close reading. The focus lies on the question whether the clone appears as a moral counterpart, heteronomous subject / research object or genuine stranger in the textual negotiation. Especially, otherness becomes apparent while distinguishing between ›normal‹ and ›malformed‹ embryos as well as in the demarcation between ›reproductive‹ and ›therapeutic‹ cloning. Here, exclusions are produced continually by distinguishing between ›right‹ and ›reconstructed‹ or ›pre-‹ embryos.

The results show that it is worthwhile to take a new look at cloning for two reasons. First, otherness is constructed in the bioethical debate and in the legal discourse itself, which is relevant to the social debate. Second, novels relate to these constructions differently by confirming, enriching or subverting them. Particularly literary scenarios that represent the clone as an equal moral counterpart illustrate that its consideration as heteronomous, foreign or alien is not evident. An examination of literature sensitizes us to the fact that both the perception and the evaluation of technology are located in cultural, social and epistemic contexts. Consequently, scenarios are also constructed from a certain standpoint and perspective. Not least, this is illustrated by the cultural comparison. The analysis shows that in Germany cloning is rather perceived as disrupting cultural traditions, while in the UK it is interpreted as a continuation of freedom of action.

Another result is that certain patterns of argumentation and moral judgments are negotiated when new technological developments arise in the field of cloning. Individuality, the family and freedom of action have already since the 1970s been

central themes of recurring debates. Following a scandal involving the South Korean researcher Hwang Woo-Suk in 2005, the debate moved to the background of attention. Biology and medicine, however, progressed uninterrupted - which recently resulted in new discussions about stem cell research and gene editing.

Against this background, the question arises whether bioethics should only discuss topics which correspond to the important 'turns' and the rise of public attention, or whether it should continue its critical normative and descriptive analysis even after such scandals. Accordingly, the central demand of the thesis is to reflect on how moral beliefs about the future are located in the present, representing the situated knowledge and the standpoint of the person who is arguing. The concept of alterity can be used from an ethical perspective to argue why the construction of the Other should be countered on an individual and on a societal level.