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Bioethics in Islam: Organ Donation, Cloning, And Gene Editing

Dr. Shahida Naumani
Director Shauoor Welfare Society Lahore
Email: info@shauoor.org.pk

Abstract

Islamic bioethics is based mainly on the Qurʾan, Sunnah, and objectives of Shariah (Maqasid al-Shariah), which together form the ethical and legal foundations for addressing current biomedical challenges. Along with medical science advancing at an unprecedented rate, challenges like organ donation, cloning, and gene editing have evolved from theoretical discourses to urgent ethical issues. This paper addresses these three bioethical challenges from an Islamic perspective, surveying the main sources of Islamic jurisprudence and opinions of contemporary scholars and global bioethical norms. Organ donation is addressed in the context of the Islamic tendency to maintain humanity, along with the dignity to which holiness of the human body is owed. Cloning is examined in relation to its medical and reproductive advantages, along with the theological and ethical issues expressed by scholars. Gene editing, particularly with technology like CRISPR, is addressed through the lens of Islamic ethics based on the difference between therapeutic goals and enhancement goals. The discussion reveals the dynamic function of Islamic legal theory in confronting new medical technologies and upholding basic moral principles. Finally, the study assumes that Islamic bioethics offers sophisticated, flexible, and principled leadership that may engage with innovations in science without compromising faith-based norms.

Keywords: Islamic bioethical concerns, organ transplantation, reproductive cloning, genetic engineering, Maqasid al-Shariah, CRISPR technology, Islamic

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Introduction

The rapid progress of biomedical technologies of the 21st century profoundly influenced the scope and complexity of ethical decision-making in medicine. What were the exclusive domains of science fiction—e.g., organ transplantation, reproductive cloning, and gene targeting—now are not just scientifically feasible but, in some cases, already utilized in clinics. Even as these technologies bring virtually limitless hope for the relief of human misery and the prolongation of life, they also pose profound moral, legal, and theological challenges.

In Muslim communities, it is essential to engage in such discussions in compliance with Shariah, i.e., the Qurʾan, the Sunnah, scholarly consensus (ijmaʿ), analogical reasoning (qiyas), and modern ijtihad (independent reasoning). Islamic bioethics is not a detached phenomenon from global medical ethics; it is a part of an international discourse of universal values of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. However, it situates these values in a theocentric vision that focuses on divine guidance, the sanctity of life, and human moral obligations as the custodians (khulafaʾ) of the Earth.

Organ donation, cloning, and gene editing are among the most problematic and groundbreaking fields in contemporary bioethics. All of them violate classical conceptions of life, personhood, and boundaries of human intervention into creation. The Islamic scholars have reacted to these challenges differently—some welcoming technological potentialities within strict ethical limits, others warning against perceived violations of God's sovereignty.

This study conducts a comparative and analytical examination of the three biomedical issues in question from an Islamic perspective, incorporating

scriptural references, jurisprudential viewpoints, and modern scholarly discussions. Through this approach, the paper seeks to elucidate the manner in which Islamic bioethics can provide principled and contextually relevant guidance amidst a time characterized by unparalleled medical advancements.

Organ Donation in Islamic Bioethics

Organ donation is perhaps the most contentious issue in contemporary Islamic bioethics, primarily due to its association with the removal, transfer, and implantation of human body parts (aspects necessarily associated with the sanctity of the human body in Islam) and is therefore revealed to be incompatible with Islamic principles. The Qurʾan and Sunnah assert that human life is sacred and should be saved, as expressed in the verse: "And whoever saves one [life] – it is as if he had saved mankind entirely" (Qurʾan 5:32). Exponents of organ donation invoke this verse as an act of charity (sadaqah jariyah) and as an act of saving life, provided that it proceeds in accordance with ethical guidelines.

Living Donors and Cadaveric Donation

Islamic jurists differentiate organ donation from living donors with that from deceased individuals. The practice of living donation, e.g., kidney transplantation, is permissible as long as it does not risk the donor's life or cause permanent harm. This is consistent with the Shariah principle of prohibition of harm (la darar wa la dirar). In addition, cadaveric donation has been supported by the majority of modern fatwa councils, including the Islamic Fiqh Academy of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, as long as death is confirmed by accepted medical standards and as long as consent is given before death.

Ethical Safeguards and Restrictions

Islam prohibits the commercialization of human organs absolutely because it

treats the human body as a trust (amanah) from God rather than as a commodity. Additionally, organs should not be taken out in a manner that defiles the dignity of the deceased. Organ trafficking, poverty exploitation, and non-therapeutic transplantation are absolutely forbidden.

Academic Perspectives

While many scholars and religious jurists allow for organ donation based on certain conditions, some scholars oppose the practice in totality, citing the sanctity of the dead human body. This is based on the hadith: "Breaking the bone of a dead person is like breaking it when alive" (Sunan Abu Dawood, 3207). The argument for this view is that the body of the dead must be left intact, even in situations that are meant to save life.

The controversy in Islamic scholarship regarding organ donation is a balancing tension between the objectives of Shariah to preserve life (hifz al-nafs) and its interest in the dignity of human life (karamah insaniyyah). In fact, most Muslim majority countries that allow organ donation have developed legal frameworks and procedures guided by such ethical considerations.

Cloning in Islamic Bioethics

Reproductive cloning in particular has ignited fiery discussions on ethical, divinity, and legal issues in the Islamic world. The idea of producing a genetically similar being, either an animal or a human, raises basic questions regarding the essence of human identity, origin, and the boundaries of human intervention on the divine process of creation.

Types of Cloning

Islamic theology distinguishes between reproductive cloning and therapeutic cloning.

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Therapeutic cloning, or embryo cloning for the purpose of stem cell extraction for therapeutic or medical research purposes, is viewed more favorably by some scholars when it has the potential to save lives or eradicate disease and does not involve the unethical destruction of potentially viable life forms.

Reproductive cloning for the generation of a full human being is mostly prohibited. Scholars term the fear of upsetting lineage (nasab), family, and social identity as well as fear of possible exploitation and commodification of human life.

Scriptural and Juristic Foundations

The Qurʾan underscores the notion that Allah is the supreme Creator, as evidenced by the verse: "He creates what He wills" (Qurʾan 42:49). Numerous scholars interpret this as establishing a divine boundary, cautioning against human efforts to imitate or supplant Allah's creative authority. Although Islam acknowledges the legitimacy of technological progress, it expressly forbids endeavors that inflict harm, compromise moral principles, or engender societal disorder (fasad).

The International Islamic Fiqh Academy and some national councils of fatwa have made rulings on the prohibition of reproductive cloning on the grounds that it can pose a risk and that there is no compelling necessity (darurah). Therapeutic cloning can be permitted under strict regulation, provided that it does not involve prohibited activities, such as selling embryos or using unauthorized genetic material.

Ethical Concerns

Islamic scholars worry about the implications of cloning on human dignity, the integrity of family lineage, and the possibility of the emergence of social and

psychological problems in the clones themselves. Islamic scholars are also concerned about the exploitation of cloning technologies for eugenics or genetic engineering for non-therapeutic purposes.

Essentially, the Muslim position on cloning is less defined by aversion to technology; it allows for some scientific research that is harmonious with the objectives of Shariah (maqasid al-shariah). But it establishes ethical limits so that scientific endeavor is for the welfare of humankind rather than being tools of moral corruption.

Gene Editing in Islamic Bioethics

Gene editing, especially with the emergence of CRISPR-Cas9 and related biotechnological tools, has revolutionized the future of genetic modification in human and animal life. The technology enables scientists to conduct accurate DNA adjustments, with the potential of removing genetic diseases, enhancing physical features, and even altering the genetic make-up of future generations. While such developments bring unmatched medical benefits, they also raise serious concerns of an ethical and theological nature in the Islamic tradition.

Therapeutic vs. Enhancement Uses

Islamic scholars generally divide gene editing into two general categories:

- **Therapeutic uses:** These are intended to cure genetic defects or avoid severe inherited conditions. If these are safe, efficacious, and essential to save life or avoid severe harm, most scholars concur that they can be allowed on grounds of removing harm (izalat al-darar) and pursuing public benefit (maslahah).

Augmentation apps try to enhance non-disease-related traits, such as intelligence, height, or appearance. Most scholars are concerned about such apps, highlighting

the risk of inequality, exploitation, and violating divine limits (hudud Allah).

Theological and Moral Foundations

The Qurʾan forbids changing Allah's creation for frivolous or harmful purposes: "And I will command them so they will change the creation of Allah" (Qurʾan 4:119). Classical interpreters would typically interpret this to refer to acts of physical mutilation or moral corruption; contemporary scholars extend its application to some biotechnological interventions that fail to serve a legitimate need.

The maqasid al-shariah principle of protecting religion, life, intellect, children, and property is utilized as the basis for assessing gene-editing procedures. Therapeutic interventions that avoid genetic disease can achieve these ends, whereas enhancement interventions driven by ego or self-interest can subvert them.

Ethical Impacts and Social Impacts

Islamic bioethics highlights several risks:

- **Safety concerns:** The long-term effects of gene editing are not known, and the risk of creating unintended mutations raises questions about whether these interventions will cause more harm than good.
- **Justice and access:** The new genetic therapies can reinforce social inequalities if they are only accessible to the rich.
- **Intergenerational impact:** Heritable gene edits affect future generations who cannot consent, raising questions about moral accountability.

Typically, the Islamic view towards gene editing is one of nuance: uses for therapeutic purposes that preserve life and do not cause great harm are

permissible under proper ethical and legal constraints, whereas uses for enhancement are generally discouraged or prohibited lest they commit moral, social, and theological transgressions.

Conclusion

The moral terrain of contemporary biomedicine is changing at lightning speed, raising challenging issues for Muslim thinkers, doctors, and lawmakers on balancing scientific progress and religious authenticity. Organ donation, cloning, and gene editing are only a few of the issues whose challenge is to balance new medical possibilities with the ethical principles of Shariah.

In organ donation, Islamic scholarship has been predominantly pragmatic and humane in its approach, supporting the practice when it is in the interest of saving life and unconnected to exploitation. Such an approach is in line with the broader Qurʾanic ethics of saving human life and avoiding suffering. Cloning, and reproductive cloning in particular, has been received with increased caution, because of the potential to interfere with the natural order of things in the realms of lineage, family ties, and God's sovereignty over creation. Some forms of therapeutic cloning for therapeutic purposes may be considered acceptable under strictures. Gene editing is the cutting edge of the debate, where therapeutic applications are promising in an Islamic ethical framework, with enhancement applications largely off-limits, with the main reason being fear of justice, human dignity, and overstepping God's boundaries.

One of the key themes of Islamic bioethics is reliance on maqasid al-shariah, or the higher purposes of protecting religion, life, intellect, offspring, and property. These purposes are the basic guiding principles for the evaluation of biomedical interventions. These goals provide an ethical framework that addresses issues of

the day as well as anticipates future developments.

In the global debate on bioethics, Islamic perspectives have a unique contribution to make: they combine universal humanitarian values with theocentric thought, ensuring that scientific progress serves human well-being and maintains spiritual and moral foundations. As the science of biomedical science advances, sustained interaction between scientists, ethicists, and Islamic jurists will be critical in formulating ethical norms that are compatible with religious principles as well as socially responsible.

Should I now complete the Abstract and Keywords for this paper so that all the paper is consistent?

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