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Cloning

To clone is to imprint a human egg with genetic material taken entirely from a single person, producing a genetic replica of that person. This is different from normal reproduction, in which genetic material from two persons, mother and father, is combined in a third, their child.

A clone, though a *genetic* replica, is not an exact duplicate of his parent, as in the Michael Keaton movie "Multiplicity." Although the genetic material of the two persons is identical, the clone will be much younger, and will inevitably be raised in a different environment from the parent. Identical twins, who also share a common genetic makeup, differ from one another significantly, and no doubt a cloned child would be even more different from his parent. Identical twins often have their similarities reinforced by being raised in the same household, receiving the same education, being subject to similar influences. A cloned child would not have anywhere near that level of environmental sameness with his parent.

It seems almost inevitable that in the near future someone will succeed in cloning a human being. Indeed, that may already have been achieved. The technique is available, having succeeded with Dolly the sheep and many other animals. So the ethical treatises are flowing thick and fast. This topic is a good one on which to practice our skills of ethical reflection, because there is a great need to distinguish between serious reasoning and hysterical ranting.

There are some good reasons for Christians to oppose the cloning of humans at this time:

1. Research into the cloning of humans would require destruction of many fertilized eggs and embryos. Given the pro-life premise that the fertilized egg is a human person, with the right to life granted in the sixth commandment, such research involves murder, and Christians should not condone it.
2. As of now, the process of cloning as performed on animals produces a high risk in the clones of birth defects and other serious health problems. It is wrong to conceive a human being in such a way as to virtually ensure such problems.
3. It is hard to imagine a good motive for creating a clone of oneself, rather than reproducing normally or using other artificial means of conception (artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, etc.) Some may secretly wish hereby to achieve some

kind of immortality, but of course that is foolish and wrong. Others may want to see someone live after them who has exactly the same personality, talents and virtues. But talents and virtues may have as much to do with environment, training, etc. as genetics. The same questions arise about someone's attempt to make a perfect genetic copy of somebody else, say, a spouse, or someone they admire, from genetic material that has been frozen or otherwise preserved.

I can, however, imagine one good motive: A married couple can't have biological children because one spouse is incurably infertile. But they wish to have a child who carries on the genetic inheritance of *one* of them, without bringing a third party (artificial insemination by donor, surrogate motherhood) into the picture. Certainly the desire to continue one's genetic inheritance is not a bad thing, and the desire to keep third parties out of a couple's reproductive life (though a difficult question ethically) is certainly a godly desire.

So the question does arise: If research on cloning reaches a point of success, where clonal reproduction is no more risky than natural reproduction, should Christians approve of it (given the godly motivation described above)?

Here the hysteria mounts: Isn't such cloning playing God? Consider some arguments against cloning even in the best-case scenario noted above:

1. "God has restricted the right to govern human reproduction." Well, of course God governs everything. But what has he said that forbids cloning?
2. "Cloning is an unnatural process." Yes, in a way, but so is birth control. So is healing by antibiotics. So is surgery. But God does not call us to leave nature as it is, but to take dominion of nature for his glory (Gen. 1:28ff). See course discussions on "natural law" ethics. It is relevant, perhaps, also to mention that something like cloning does occur in nature: when one fertilized egg divides into two, creating genetically identical twins.
3. "Cloning is *creating*, while natural reproduction is *begetting*. Creating is God's prerogative; begetting is ours." To my knowledge, Scripture does not make any moral distinctions along these lines. Certainly we have creative powers that are part of the divine image in which we are made. We are not, of course, creators in the sense of making the first genetic material. God did that in Gen. 2:7. But it is not clear from Scripture that we should abstain from using the creative powers we do have, that he has given us. Note the parallel between Gen. 1:27, 5:2, and 5:3.

4. "A cloned child is given an identity not freely chosen by him" (see my review of Bouma, et al., *Christian Faith, Health, and Medical Practice*, that makes this argument). But none of us freely chooses his or her identity. We all must take the genetic cards we are dealt. The argument may seek to make the point that the cloned child of a pianist might be forced to become a pianist against his will. But that is by no means a necessary consequence of cloning, and parents of normally conceived children often impose similar pressures.
5. "Even when carried out with the best motives, one who carries out a cloning process is using a technique that has been perfected at the loss of much human life, the destruction of human embryos." This argument gives one pause, but I don't think it is determinative. Certainly the history of weaponry has advanced at the cost of much unjust destruction of human life. But is it therefore wrong for us to use that technology to pursue *just* war, or to hunt deer? We cannot evaluate an action merely on the basis of the history of similar actions. To do so is to engage in genetic fallacy. Something that was once done with a sinful purpose and result may be done again with a godly purpose and result.

So I am not convinced that there is any principle of Scripture that rules out cloning in all cases. Cloning, in the best case, is "playing God" only in the sense that we should always play God: imaging his creativity by taking dominion of natural processes for his glory.