

Why not human clones? A problematic procedure: A problematic procedure

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Last month two fertility specialists, an American and an Italian, announced plans to clone a human being in the next two years. If they don't get the job done, it's very likely that someone else on the planet will. Margaret Talbot, writing recently in the *New York Times*, reports that many scientists expect a cloned human to be introduced within five years. "It's relatively easy to set up a lab and find someone competent to carry out the procedure," one researcher told Talbot. "From a technical point of view," said another, "cloning a human being would be a very simple thing."

Experiments on human cloning are probably taking place somewhere right now. Though U.S. law precludes federal money from being spent on such research, and four states have outlawed cloning for reproductive purposes, the field remains wide open to privately funded efforts.

Talbot notes that she has encountered enormous longing for human cloning, especially among parents who have lost a young child. A casual search of the Internet turns up fervent endorsements of cloning, for utilitarian and sentimental reasons. Above all, one encounters an attitude of Why not? As one writer for the online magazine *Slate* wrote, "If humans have the right to reproduce, what right does society have to limit the means?" Given the contemporary commitment to individual rights and choices, this argument will be difficult to resist.

Nevertheless, human cloning is a profound threat to human dignity. The practice will inevitably result in a confusion of basic human roles and in the objectification of persons. Cloning is one of the clearest examples possible of treating an individual as a means.

Proponents of cloning occasionally point out that cloned humans are already among us in the form of twins—people with identical sets of DNA—so what’s the problem? Besides avoiding the fact that natural twins are always siblings, whereas a clone could be the twin of a parent or grandparent, this observation ignores a crucial moral difference: natural twins arrive as rare creations, not as specifically designed products.

The most decisive Christian response to human cloning has come from the Vatican. It has said that cloning represents “a radical manipulation of the constitutive relationality and complementarity which is at the origins of human procreation in both its biological and strictly personal aspects.” Furthermore, human cloning will foster the idea that “some individuals can have total dominion over the existence of others, to the point of programming their biological identity.” And as the practice of cloning spreads, the Vatican warns, the conviction will grow that “the value of man and woman does not depend on their personal identity but only on those biological qualities that can be appraised and therefore selected.”

Some of this language may be unfamiliar to Protestants, who historically have resisted Roman Catholic natural-law reasoning on matters of reproduction. However, the Vatican has identified the range of issues at stake and offered a powerful challenge to Protestant ethicists to offer their own arguments. It has also provided a strong rebuttal to any who would say simply, Why not?