

Wednesday, July 7, 2010

Cloning and Mormonism

I just read *The New York Regional Mormon Singles Halloween Dance: A Memoir* and it is hilarious and a little sad. I was really worried it would bash Mormons too much but it was too honest for that. No hate here, no prejudice, just honest reality. I liked it a lot. As someone who has actually thought about my faith and grappled with its major questions and problems, but have still chosen to be Mormon, I can really relate to her. But at one point of the book a guy the author dated asks her about cloning. It really throws her and she doesn't have a good answer, except that it's not possible to clone a real thinking person. I can see why she thought this but she is wrong. I wrote a response to her: what I would like to tell her in person. It is below the fold. What I'd like to say to Elna Baker. First off, cloning doesn't go against any of your Mormon religious principles. In Genesis it says that God created the world, but the Hebrew word is actually better translated as "organized" the world. Thus God took matter that already existed and sculpted it together into the world as it is. God is not a magician - He did not say "Abracadabra" and POOF! the world appeared. He is a scientist. He is a genius. He organized the world and everything in it using scientific principles. As we delve deeper into physics, astronomy, biology, and other sciences, we merely discover what He always knew. The human body is merely an extension of this. The name of our first father, Adam, literally means "earth." Out of the same components that God used to make the world, He organized our bodies. And when we die, we will "return to dust" -- our bodies will break down into those components once again.

We have, in the pursuit of science, discovered how an egg and sperm interact to begin building a new body. We have developed this knowledge to the point where we can "clone," or faithfully reproduce an organism. Basically, we are learning how to organize a body with available materials. As in all things, we are children groping after the perfect knowledge of our Father, and as time goes by we collectively learn more and more as generations pass. However, this does not mean that we are anywhere near God's level of knowledge and genius. We are like a toddler with a plastic hammer, emulating a parent who can with his own hands build a mansion. This is both naive and wonderful of us, and an indictment of our vast and fabulous eternal potential. Does it make us able to author life? No.

Cloning already exists. Any set of identical twins are genetically the same, just as a clone is genetically identical to its "parent." We have learned, in our childish (but wonderfully inspired) endeavors, to reproduce an organism near-perfectly. However, we can not, and never will, grant the breath of life to that organism. We can build the body out of clay, but we can not usher souls into it. This is a divine power which is too powerful to be given into the hands of inexperienced and naive children. Only God can breathe life into clay. With a set of identical twins, they may look alike, but each body contains a very different soul. Ask any parent who has raised a child--that child's personality and spirit came pre-formed. A preschooler will naturally be shy or gregarious, studious or active, and nothing that the parent tries will change this. I recognize in my four-year old son many traits that I possess myself, and yet he is undoubtedly his own, separate, and firmly formed person. He was born that way. The spirit that God ushered into that little skinny, blonde body is completely unique.

If cloning does progress to humankind, and if a fully formed human is cloned, it doesn't break any rules of religion. We are merely fumbling around with God's building blocks. We create the body out of clay. Will God fill it with a soul? I don't know. I can tell you this: if He does not, that body will not live and breathe and walk around and talk. If He does, then one of God's spirit children has been assigned to that body, just as we all are assigned to a body, and it will live and breathe and laugh and love just like the rest of us. There is nothing we can do to influence this process. If God chooses to put a soul into a cloned body, He will have a great reason to do so. Just because the creation of that body was influenced by His clumsy children doesn't mean that it's not a suitable vessel for one of His precious children.

Cloning may seem like a scary concept, but in truth it is just one of the ways that humans, working together, have tried to elevate our state closer to that of God. Whether or not those who desire to clone a human reach their ultimate goal, God is completely in charge of what follows.

Posted by Daboo in Personal Entry at 13:40

Way to go. Now someone is going to take this as a reason to create an island full of cloned velociraptors. Comments (2)
Anonymous on Jul 7 2010, 21:51

i picked that book up at b&n and read a few chapters. i enjoyed it. turns out the author is in my old girlfriend's ward in nyc. i hear her comments in sunday school have been sorta unique.

apparently a few years ago they determined that identical twins aren't completely genetically identical. it took a while for us to realize this so i'm guessing the differences must be pretty negligable. i'm guessing that if human cloning is successful the degree of difference would be about the same between a clone and its "parent."

anyway, that's totally unimportant. my guess is that if human cloning is successful there would be about as much of a difference in personality and soul between clones as there would be between identical twins. i wouldn't say it's a sin to create clones as much as i'd say it was a sin to have a child for frivolous reasons. the sin would be in creating life with the assumption that the life is not its own, but owned -- perhaps by militaries or corporations or whatever. Comment (1)

Anonymous on Jul 8 2010, 01:08

RAWR RAWR RAWR Comment (1)

Anonymous on Jul 8 2010, 12:07

Good post but I have a couple of thoughts.

Just having the ability to do something does not make it right, or sanctioned by God to do it. I have the ability to kill (as does God). It is not always right that I do so. I have the ability to create life (or I assume I do, up to this point it has not been proven). So if I were to just grab any partner and make a baby, it would not make it morally correct. As a matter of fact God would frown on it unless it was done in a proper manner that He condones.

I don't know doctrinally where we stand on the issue of cloning, nor do I know what I personally believe when it comes to human cloning. Animal cloning I am ok with, though I don't really know what that gets us as an advantage. If we are talking about cloning certain parts of the human body (a hand, bladder, ear, etc), I can see that as probably ok.

The really fun stuff relates to what joN touched on with clone rights. Can I make a clone of myself just to harvest some organs or because I don't want to have to mow my lawn every week? I mean it's my DNA and I paid the money for the duplicate, don't I get to say what happens to it? Or perhaps there could be a new market for preferred body parts. I could clone a black mans scalp so that I can finally have a thick lustrous afro! :) Comment (1)

Anonymous on Jul 8 2010, 15:50

There are already organ donors and children for those uses of clones.

I don't see a clone as any different than any other child. If raised within the sacred bonds of marriage, what does it matter the DNA contained therein? If raised without, how is it different from any other child sired out of wedlock? What's the difference between a clone and a couple who unite a sperm and egg in a test tube and then plant the then fertilized egg in the woman's uterus? Comments (2)

Anonymous on Jul 8 2010, 16:04

Yes, I also routinely scalp children so I can have lustrous hair. I'm glad I'm not the only one! Comment (1)

Anonymous on Jul 8 2010, 16:42