

GENETIC ETHICS

Questions

- 1 What are the given limits to our being co-creators with God?
- 2 What are the natural limits...?

Given means God-given. Obviously we cannot exercise powers the Creator has not given us.

Natural means, in the ancient phrase, "according to nature." Obviously we can violate nature, think-act-live unnaturally. In Shakespeare, "unnatural" conveys horror. The categories "un/natural" (being decisional) do require definition for guidance toward action: they are matters of social construction (whether or not in the light of revelation) & personal decision. E.g., is homosexual orientation/behavior natural (specifically not, in some OT & NT passages)? Or is the orientation natural and the behavior unnatural? Or is not even the orientation natural though prevalent?

- 3 What have we Christians to say about "If it can be done it will be done"?
- 4 Should genetic engineering be under surveillance only of morality (personal decision-making by geneticists)? Or is it a proper topos in ethics (philosophical considerations of good/evil, right/wrong)? Or even in law (coercion)?
- 5 If also law, what behaviors should be proscribed (sanctioned in the legal sense)? What punishments should apply, severally, to those behaviors? Who should be authorized to administer, severally, the punishments?
- 6 In light of the biophilism of much current Christian thought (including this Pope's "Gospel of Life"), should Christians be predisposed to favor genetic engineering on the ground that it is for the bio-improvement of plant-animal-human life?
- 7 Should Christian thinkers undertake to produce a formal set of guidelines for genetic engineers & the institutions using their products (both knowledge and processes)?
- 8 How can this Colloquy be helpful to pastors?

Scriptures

While I'm poorly read on genetic engineering,* I'm not so (as is this cartoon's Carl) on the Bible. Nor do I think it would be wise for me to sink heavy time into g.e.: I'm content to "see the movie," esp. noting any contact points with religion. In my superficial exposure, so far I've seen no explicit biblical reference & no positive reference to divinity (God has been brought in only to say "No!").

Caution: While I know of no geneticists who've devoted so much time to Scripture as to neglect their professional work, I know some clergy who are suspiciously competent in discussing genetics (are they neglecting Bible & theology?). (A current Net ad tries to worry you about falling behind on "news": "Never be surprised by your neighbors. Get your local news HERE!")

To encourage a theologian to write on g.e., I suggested that he think of a **traffic light** & use its colors as the spine of his piece (which then he did): (1) **GREEN:** What I consider unobjectionable in current & projected g.e. **YELLOW:** Slow down & be ready to stop! Some experimentation, without cautious watchfulness, may go over the top of acceptability. **RED:** I must rule out projections, processes, & programs that seem to me to be in violation of the divine image in humanity & of human dignity, or as excessively interfering with the given cellular structures of animals and/or plants. At first, I thought to use this schema for distributing scriptures I think worth a place at the table; but I decided that would spin the texts, & this Thinksheet's function would be better served simply by listing revelant texts in canonical order:

- 1 **Gn.1.1** (the Source), **vs.11** (plants), **vs.20** (sea animals, & birds), **vs.24** (land animals), **vs.26** (people, to "have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals"). All living beings are commanded to reproduce; & (**vs.28**) we are (1) "in charge" of them all, earth to be under our "control." **2.7:** Human life is a compound of soil & divine breath--(**vv.8-9**) put down in Eden, a garden God had

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* Even after reading 100s of sites on the Net, including "G.E.", "Genetic Ethics," "Bible and Genetics," etc.

"planted" & (vs.15) which we were to "cultivate and guard." God makes woman from man's rib (vv.21-22), & (vs.24) they become "one" (Heb. "one flesh").

2 The second genealogy (Gn.5) is immediately followed by (6.1-4) giant offspring of heaven/earth sexual intercourse, & (vs.19) animal-&-bird sexual pairs in Noah's ark. Then the Noah covenant, including (8.22): "As long as the world exists, there will be a time for planting and a time for harvest" & (9.1-3): "Have many children....All the animals, birds, and fish will live in fear of you. They are all placed under your power. Now you can eat them, as well as green plants; I give them all to you for food." In creation, we humans are unique for having God's breath & bearing God's image, so (vs.6) the death penalty for murderers.

3 Gn.11.1-9: Linguistic [& genetic?] diversity viewed as prophylactic against species self-deification: unity is bad because dangerous, diversity is divine divide-&-suppress (hubris). Is genetic engineering a new form of hubris?

4 Gn.15, genes-&-land covenant. 18.14: "anything too hard for the LORD?"

5 Gn.30.32-43: By genetic (?) mimesis, Jacob outbreeds Laban's flocks. God made this happen for justice: 31.10-13. 38.8-9: spilling semen.

6 Laws governing sexual intercourse--e.g., Lev.15--have, at least some of them, genetic implications. And see 19.19: "Do not crossbreed domestic animals. Do not plant two kinds of seed in the same field."....26.20: Ground unfruitful to the disobedient (Deut.11.17;28.38-40;29.23; cp.Cain, Gn.4.12; & Lev.26.16; M.4.7; L.8.14; Is.5.2,4; Heb.6.8; Mt.21.19 & parallel; Jn.15.2; Jude 12).

7 Deut.32.18: Amnesiac about God, who'd "given them birth [or "life"]."

8 Ps.33.5: God's "constant love fills the earth." "A greater [daily] wonder than that Christ fed 5,000 men with five loaves and made wine from water" (Luther on this vs. [W.A.49.435f]). 51.5: "I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me." TEV: "I have been evil from the time I was born; from the day of my birth I have been sinful." 91.16: "Long life" as "reward."

9 Prov.29.14: "the rights of the poor."

10 Is.27.6: "The earth will be covered with the fruit they produce." 32.15: "The wasteland will become fertile." 45.10: "Why did you make me like this?"

11 Jer.32.29, an abandoned doctrine: "The parents ate the sour grapes, but the children got the sour taste." (Eze.18.3: God says, "You will not repeat this proverb in Israel any more." But Lam.5.7: "we are suffering for...[our ancestors'] sins.")

12 Eze.37.7: "the bones began to join together." 47.12: "all kinds of trees" bear monthly fruit (monthly, as the Rev.22.2 "tree of life," whose "leaves are for the healing of the nations"; different from the Gn.2.9;3.22-24 tree of immortal life).

13 1Chron.9.1 census "according to their families," but the Pastorals (1Tim.1.4, Tit.3.9) warn against genealogies as esteem-props. But Mt. begins with a genealogy of Jesus, another such appearing in L.3.

14 Mal.2.10: "Don't we all have the same father? Didn't the same God create us all?" Ps.2.7: God as the king's father; cp. spiritual adoption (Ro.8.15;Gal.4.6).

15 Mt.1.18 (L.1.35): heaven/earth pregnancy. 5.38-39: punitive mutilation proscribed. 7.15-20: "by their fruits" (discernment of true/false prophets analogized to fruit-production). Cp.12.33;L.6.44;Jas.3.12. 10.35-37: Christianity transcends biology; individual commitment may disrupt family. The Akedah ("binding," Gn.22.9) is the OT's most dramatic instance: God's promise of Abraham's descendants could not be fulfilled if God's command that Abraham kill his only legitimate son Isaac were obeyed. An extension: Christian's are children of our "spiritual father" Abraham (Ro.4.16)....Mt.12.50/L.14.26....Mt.13.3-9, the soils parable; vs.26, "the tares also."....25.31-46: sheep/goats (incl. food-drink).

16 L.13.8: fertilizer.

17 Jn.1.13: God's chn. "not by natural means" (cp.3.5,6,8; 1Jn.3.9;5.1,18). 15.2: pruning (Amos' occupation).

18 1Cor.15.35-38: resurrection analogies (seed & flesh).

19 Eph.3.14-15: Heaven/earth "families" named by the heaven-Father.

20 Rev.4.6b-11(Gn.1.26-28;2.7-9,15-20a; Ps.139.13-15; 2Cor.4.4-6)....21.1-7(Gn.12.1-3; Is.42.5-10a; 2Cor.5.17)....22.1-2,14(Gn.3.1-5;11.4; Prov.11.30; Is.55.12; Ro.1.25; Rev.2.7). Just before I did §20, I got from Paul Hammer a letter with these suggestions as possibilities.