

Second thoughts from a cloning society

D Gareth Jones

It's 2060. Human clones are all around, though often we have no idea who's a clone and who isn't. The other day I got a great surprise when a friend told me she was one. I would never have guessed. Of every 1,000 babies born now, 20 are cloned. We have laws to govern cloning just as we have laws to protect human embryos and control surrogacy. Animal cloning has revolutionised agriculture, and many pharmaceuticals now come via cloning in animals.

This all stemmed from groundbreaking work back in the late 1990s. Research on sheep showed that by transplanting the nucleus from the cell of one adult sheep (A) into an egg of another sheep (B), the egg with the transplanted nucleus acted as if it had been fertilised by a sperm. The resulting lamb was genetically identical to A.

The attraction of adult-cell cloning was always that outcome was known. Once an animal with a desired trait had been obtained, for example, a sheep genetically engineered to produce milk laced with an enzyme or a drug, then numerous further copies could be produced. This proved a highly effective biological means of pharmaceutical production.

In 2060 we recognise three forms of human cloning:

Ego cloning is cloning for social reasons: public figures and ordinary people wanted 'another me';

Medical cloning is for overcoming conditions like infertility, where the male is sterile, or for some genetic disorders;

Research cloning, which could be used to produce tissues for other people, including cell lines and organs.

Ego clones

Ego cloning was always controlled by legislation but it's had its problems. Individuals got frustrated when 'my' clone had my failings, as well as my strengths. Frequently, clones turned out to have totally different interests from the cloned individual. The new 'me' was more unlike 'me' than I would ever have thought possible. There was the case of the self-made businessman-cum-philanthropist whose clone turned out to be a budding philosopher uninterested in money and abysmal at making it!

Surprisingly, lots of Christian groups went in for cloning. Certain churches decided to clone their good preachers, and

some worked well. A few leading preachers today are clones. But some clones were - it seemed - ghastly mistakes: they were not even Christians, let alone great preachers. The mistake people made was to think that God was limited by genetics, but genetic similarity between two individuals does not ensure spiritual similarity.

Clones are far more human than people in the past ever imagined. They are just like you and me - assuming you are not a clone; (I'm not . . . at least, I'm pretty sure I'm not). God looks upon clones as truly human persons, and they are just as responsible for their motives and actions as anyone else. They can have a personal relationship with God through Christ, in exactly the same way as non-clones, or they can reject God. Just because they are cloned replicas of their faithful fathers (or mothers) does not mean they themselves will end up faithful disciples.

Ego cloning proved a failure in families where the clones were treated as slaves, created to do their master's will. What went wrong was that clones were not treated as equals; they were downgraded. That's where the problems lie. I'm not suggesting ego cloning is a good thing, but the biggest problems arise when clones are forced to behave as others expect them to behave. But then, why did you clone yourself in the first place? Why should you accept someone as different from you when you brought them into the world precisely to be like you?

Even when clones turned out well as human beings, many of us were left with nagging doubts, because the individuality and unpredictability of human life had gone. Reflecting on this, Christians glimpsed in a fresh way how God deals with us - as unique individuals. We dare not deal otherwise with each other, cloning or no.

In certain respects, cloning did not turn out as bad as some expected, but it didn't achieve much either. If individuals are given freedom and allowed truly to become themselves, ego cloning becomes redundant. It is a farce; an all-too-obvious example of tragic technical excess.

Medical cloning

They found many medical reasons in favour of cloning. It proved beneficial for couples whose infertility was successfully by-passed. It is hard to condemn those couples, and the resulting clones (children) give the impression of being as well-adjusted as any other children. This is because they were brought into existence to be themselves. They weren't created

in order to be genetically identical to one 'parent'. They were created to be loved and to love.

Medical cloning has been widely used to enable single women and lesbian couples to have children. Gay men, and the occasional single man, have also used it, but of course they have needed to employ women as surrogates, the 'male womb' still not being quite perfected. The practice became very difficult to control. Once the technique was available the drive to use it everywhere imaginable was strong.

Cloning also became divorced (was it ever not divorced?) from moral values. It was simply used as a way to enable absolutely anyone at all to have children outside any conventional commitment relationship. Perhaps the controls were always ineffective because the technique itself so completely emphasised the manufacturing side of reproduction?

But what has been the real cost of producing these children, not just for individuals, but for society? The price society is paying for having accepted cloning into its midst is not the horror some imagined. It is far more subtle than that. It is in the changed expectations we have of children, in the new way we look at them, and in the new things we can do to ourselves and to them.

Should we be bringing 'another me' into existence, even for good reasons? Has cloning, even for the most humanitarian reasons, brought us unnervingly close to the disposable society? Medical cloning is done from different motives than ego cloning, but do I really want 'another me', even to overcome infertility or genetic disease? Perhaps having no children is better than having a cloned child, but neither way is easy. Children truly are 'made' with this technique; this is both its biological potential and its moral uncertainty.

Research clones

This proved the most challenging of the three categories. Ethical discussion tended over the years to focus here because it was closest to science fiction scenarios. Aldous Huxley almost got it right in the 1930s in *Brave New World*. The problems he foresaw are the same ones that confronted our policy makers.

How can you possibly perform research ethically on human clones when producing them to be the source of cell lines and organs means that the clones themselves can have no say in what is done to them? It amounts to producing human beings (clones) in order to sacrifice them when organs or tissues are required.

We were clear here, and there have been no moves - at least, none that I know of - to produce research clones. There have been extensive experiments with animal clones, but not human ones. We recognised that would be taking us back to the dark days of dubious human experimentation, rather than into some glorious future. Some scientists exerted considerable pressure to make us go that way but society thankfully concluded the drawbacks were too great.

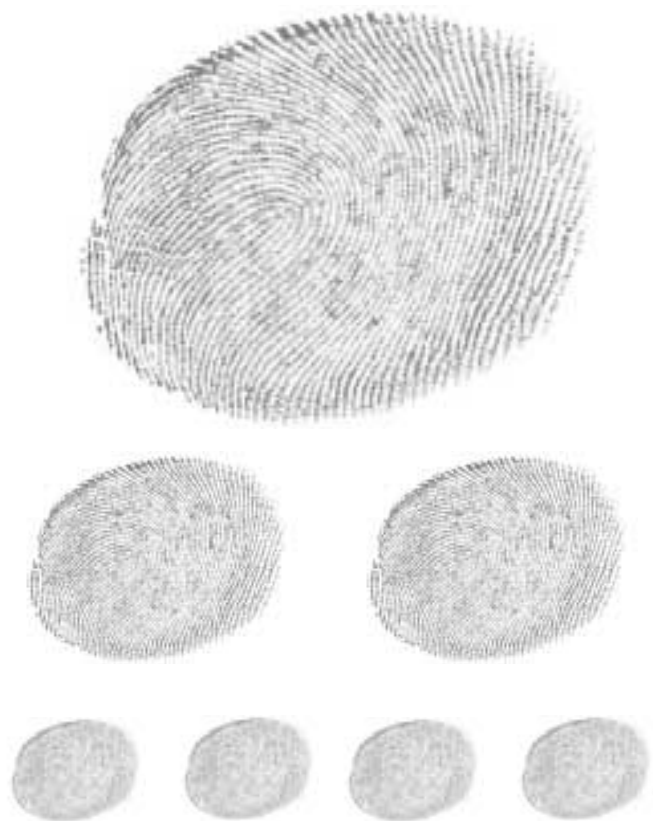
To destroy human clones so others might live was considered outlandish even by the ethically illiterate. We could not tolerate such gross undervaluation of human beings. A clone born in 2060 is treated in the same way as any other human being.

What should we have done?

The new procedures became established in the early years of this 21st century, and we can now see their good and their bad features in a way not possible before their introduction. We can learn from our mistakes, perhaps.

Cloning proved a two-edged sword. The pressures it unleashed have been similar to those unleashed by all the technologies used to control and manipulate human reproduction. Society has been changed for ever and Christian standards have been under great threat.

Technologies like these can be harnessed, and if to be used at all must be harnessed for good ends, but different agendas made this extremely difficult. Perhaps they made it impossible?



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