



# CLONE ON!

## THE NATURE-NURTURE CONTROVERSY AND HOW HUMAN CLONING WILL ILLUMINATE IT



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Humans have a nature. We have a maximum of two arms, rather than five, six or fifty. None of us is thirty foot or two inches tall. We come in two genders, the females having breasts and the males not, the males being on average taller and stronger. None of us has wings like a bird, or sonar like a bat.

But pointing out that humans have a nature isn't the same as knowing in detail what it is. Yes, humans have two arms. Yes, human females aren't the same as human males. But it doesn't follow that because, for example, "women are different" (which they definitely are) we know all about these differences and that "science proves" that women should stick to housekeeping and child-rearing and avoid front line service as fighter pilots.

The crude physical outlines of human nature are clear enough. But exactly how our genes interact with our surroundings is much harder to tease out. Am I argumentative because I was born argumentative? Would I have become as argumentative as I am now if I'd been snatched away from my parents at birth and raised by people who always agreed with one another? Or was I raised to be argumentative, on account of my father being a courtroom lawyer and my mother believing that arguing is good for you? Was it my nature or my nurture that made me an in-your-face libertarian pamphleteer?

### NATURE, NURTURE AND POLITICS

The argument about the relative importance of heredity and environment in determining different human destinies is complicated by the fact that this argument is now and always has been embroiled in politics. Simplifying this debate brutally, collectivists have accused "genetic determinists" of deriving false and cruel political ideas from a view of human nature that mis-states the facts of, and attaches too much importance to, the human genetic inheritance. Others have accused collectivist "environmental determinists" of saying that the human mind is a blank slate upon which social forces scribble at will.<sup>1</sup>

My impression of this debate is that straw men abound, and that all serious writers of whatever political hue actually agree (a) that heredity and environment are both crucial,<sup>2</sup> and (b) that just because something is natural, that doesn't necessarily make it

right. It has been argued that humans have an inborn disposition towards "ethnic cleansing" which particular social circumstances may trigger. But we still denounce such slaughters, hence the euphemism. Some geneticists have argued that human males have an inborn tendency to kill their stepchildren, but few would excuse behaviour like that merely because it is natural.<sup>3</sup> Cancer is definitely natural, but that doesn't stop medical scientists trying to eradicate it, nor should it.

The facts of the nature-nurture controversy are what they are, and no self-respecting moralist or political theorist need fear them. As far as I'm concerned, the more scientists can learn about such things the better. If any of my beliefs about what *should be* turn out to be based on beliefs about what *is* which are later proved false, that will be my problem.

### IDENTICAL TWINS

But where might new evidence concerning the nature-nurture controversy come from? There is already a small but illuminating treasure trove of scientific data which particularly bears on this debate, namely the studies that have been made of identical twins. Particularly revealing are identical twins who, because of adoption or through muddle in maternity hospitals, have grown up apart and unaware of each other's existence, that is to say with the same nature but a different nurture. A recent British TV show revealed uncanny similarities in the way in which separated identical twins lived out their mutually ignorant lives, and equally revealing differences. When reunited, they were shown with the same pot bellies and the same psychological dispositions. They had heart attacks at the same time, did the same sorts of jobs and dressed alike. But their marriage partners varied. Fascinating stuff, but tantalisingly insufficient as scientific data. After all, these twins would have shared the same mass-audience TV shows and the same political and cultural fashions, at the same time. So their nurture wasn't so different after all.

The good news, scientifically speaking, is that this tiny trickle of twin study data may be about to become a flood.

### PLAYING GOD?

In July 1996, some scientists famously succeeded in cloning a sheep, and the ability to clone people can't be far away.<sup>4</sup>

A widespread opinion about human cloning, as about so many other things, is that there ought to be a law against it. I hold to what I take to be the libertarian orthodoxy on the subject. If some cloners want to clone, and the clones consent, then whose rights are being violated? Nobody's. Human cloning ought to be allowed.

Human cloning surely will be allowed in some parts of the world, if only because the governmental means of preventing it will not be omnipresent. A few cloned humans will be made in various more or less different sorts of circumstances, while the rest of us carry on having babies the regular old way — which is



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the ideal way for us all to find out what we think of the new procedure. I daresay we'll discover that, as with most other clever ideas, human cloning is a good thing if done well in the right circumstances, but bad if done badly or in the wrong circumstances. And the practice may then spread.

Will we be "playing God", if we allow human cloning? I think playing God is just a rude way of saying that we like to manipulate our circumstances to our advantage, the nice wording for which is being civilised. And wouldn't forbidding human cloning also be rather Godlike in its presumptuousness? Being "unnatural" isn't automatically wrong, any more than being natural is automatically right.

A friend recently put it to me that there is no principled basis for forbidding human cloning which would not also forbid many regular human births. If I thought more about that statement, I'd probably agree with it even more than I do now, but this piece is not about all of my reasons for thinking that human cloning should be legally allowed; it is about just one reason. Simply: if such cloning is allowed, we will learn a lot about life in general, and about the nature-versus-nurture controversy in particular.

### LITTLE HITLERS

Remember that film called *The Boys From Brazil*? The boys in question were Adolf Hitler clones. Suppose a squad of genetic copies of the old monster had indeed been turned loose upon the world, for real. Well, I daresay it would have been quite scary, as the film assumed, especially if all the little Hitlers were raised and educated by aging Nazis.

But would it not also have been decidedly interesting? Simply from the point of view of understanding Hitler himself, and the way that he interacted with his particular environment, the story of how these new Hitlers turned out would have been extraordinarily illuminating.

Would they all have done as they were told by their Nazi masters? Would they all have turned into rabid anti-semites? I suspect that several might have shunned Nazism and become communists or scientists, or perhaps libertarians. (Many libertarians would fiercely deny that libertarianism could have anything in common with Nazism, but the fact that they both end with the same three letters gives that game away at once.)

What sort of personal style would these Hitler clones have displayed? Would they have shared the original Hitler's fondness for public speaking? If so, would their speeches have had the same atmosphere about them as the original Hitler's speeches? Or would their speechmaking style have been different, to suit changing communicational fashions and technologies?

Would any of them, had they arrived at adolescence in the sixties, have become hippies? If so, would their hippy opinions have had anything in common with Hitler's views? (I'm thinking of such things as their views about "nature".)

Would any of them have gone into show business?

Would some of the little Hitlers have become architects, as Hitler himself tried to do, but failed?

Would they all have been obsessed, as Hitler was, with making a huge stir in the world? Assuming they managed to live down the scandal of their genetic origins, or perhaps as part of trying to do this, would many just have settled down into contentedly obscure lives as electricians, teachers, or civil servants?

What would their family lives have been like? Would most of them have stuck to the original Hitler pattern (a mistress, no kids, a dog), or would most have settled down with wives and kids, and some of them with pussy cats?

Would any of them have been gay?

As with these hypothetical and fictionalised boys, so it will be with any other clutches of cloned humans, some genetically copied from super-achievers or admired celebrities, others merely reproduced because of their supposed medical, mental or physi-

cal advantages, born in different places, and at different times (which will eliminate identical mass media or general politico-cultural background as possible alternative causes of similarity), and very possibly — like the most scientifically revealing twins in the twin studies — in ignorance of each other's existence. Talk about a scientific gold mine!

### A FLOOD OF TRUTH

Many will quickly deduce the central point of this piece simply from its title. But maybe even the small point that human cloning will help us to learn a lot may throw some further light on the human cloning debate. As I say, this is a politically fraught subject. Insofar as a person's strongly held views about politics or about anything else are based on what he might fear to be false axioms concerning the importance either of human nature or of human nurture, then that person will be nervous about what cloning might reveal. The very flood of truth which I eagerly anticipate, and which causes me to want the freedom to clone to be accepted, might cause others to oppose it. But the fear of truth is not honourable, and those gripped by it may dress it up as something else, such as the fear of the many catastrophes allegedly likely to be caused by cloning freedom.

The rest of us need have no such fears. Human cloning will cause all kinds of difficulties, and may indeed have frightful hidden dangers, especially if it becomes very popular. (That some may have intellectually ignoble reasons for opposing it doesn't mean they'll necessarily be wrong in what they do say.) But as a way of learning more about what sort of creatures we are and could become, human cloning will be a revelation.

As a human being, I say to would-be cloners: do it if you want to, but watch out, there may indeed be troubles ahead as well as delights. As a science fan, and as one who favours the growth of human knowledge generally, I say: clone on!<sup>5</sup>

### NOTES

1. For a self-consciously politicised case against genetic determinism, see Steven Rose, R. C. Lewontin and Leon J. Kamin, *Not In Our Genes — Biology, Ideology and Human Nature*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1990, first published by Pantheon Books in 1984. Among those criticised are Richard Dawkins, author of *The Selfish Gene*, first published by Oxford University Press in 1976, with a new edition published in 1989. See more recently, Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1994. The title alone makes it clear that for Pinker there is far more to human genetic programming than mere physical externalities like arms, legs or breasts.
2. Here, for example, are Rose, Lewontin and Kamin criticising cultural determinism: "The post-1968 New Left in Britain and the United States has shown a tendency to see human nature as almost infinitely plastic, to deny biology and acknowledge only social construction. The helplessness of childhood, the existential pain of madness, the failties of old age were all transmuted to mere labels reflecting the disparities of power. But this denial of biology is so contrary to actual lived experience that it has rendered people the more ideologically vulnerable to the "common-sense" appeal of reemerging biological determinism. Indeed, we argue ... that such cultural determinism can be as oppressive in obfuscating real knowledge about the complexity of the world we live in as is biological determinism." (p. 10)
3. For a whole book about nasty but natural human behaviour, see Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males — Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*, Bloomsbury, London, 1996, paperback edition 1997.
4. For more on the cloning story, see Gina Kolata, *Clone — The Road to Dolly and the Path Ahead*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1997. Kolata quotes Jacques Cohen, scientific director of assisted reproduction at the Institute of Reproductive Medicine and Science at St Barnabas Hospital, Livingstone, New Jersey: "In my opinion it is all nonsense whether it [human reproduction] is sexual or asexual. The whole argument is sort of silly — so what? People will agree with me in fifty years." (p. 210) Let's hope so.
5. A final footnote. This is a piece about genetic *copying*. It is *not* about genetic *engineering*, which seems to me far more problematic, even if my libertarian prejudice is that this too should be allowed. Making only a few copies of what already exists is one thing; modifying genes and making lots of copies is something else again.