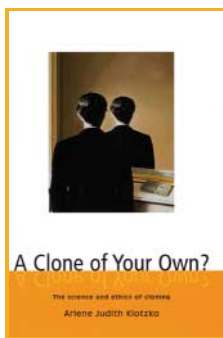


Virtual immortality

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A Clone of Your Own? The Science and Ethics of Cloning
by Arlene Judith Klotzko
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The day I finished Arlene Judith Klotzko's highly readable book, *A Clone of Your Own?*, the world received news of the successful somatic cloning of human embryos by a team of scientists in Seoul,

South Korea. This was followed by a media frenzy to dissect, once again, the social, moral and scientific implications of this inevitability. I also watched Arlene Klotzko participating in some of these discussions on various TV channels.

Now that the obstacles to the technical feasibility of human cloning have been overcome, the question of whether we want to have a clone of our own has really become pertinent. In this book, Klotzko has done a great job of making us confront our 'inwrought' wishes, anxieties and fears. Most remarkably, she has done so in such a gentle and conversational way that the reader can almost feel and hear her non-pedantic and non-patronizing friendly tone.

Klotzko is not a scientist, but she has imbibed well the intricacies of the philosophy, method and technicality of science. But she does not dazzle us with that, and

instead makes clever, and highly appropriate, use of that knowledge in leading us to initiate our own discussion and dialogue with ourselves and others. Although sometimes she may appear to be trying to impress us by name-dropping and by describing her personal meetings with the 'powerful and mighty' in science and politics, one can easily ignore that little act of vanity owing to her overall sincerity, commitment and excitement about an important topical issue. As a writer, Klotzko has turned out to be an excellent storyteller, conversationalist, and often sheer poet. Who else but Klotzko would describe human embryonic stem cells as being "...in the full flower of their youthful malleability...!" The book is sprinkled with such expressions and is accompanied by 35 photographs and original drawings by David Mann, some of which are very funny.

Klotzko's position on the issue of cloning is quite clear: she is in total support of what is often termed 'therapeutic cloning', where this powerful method can be seen as another great achievement in biomedical sciences. Taking an individual organism as the unit of independent life, she has no qualms about the use of pre-individual subunits—cells—to alleviate human suffering. But when it comes to organismic cloning, especially the cloning of human beings, she thinks that "...at least a temporary ban is morally obligatory." However, she does not have any convincing arguments in support of that view except that she would like to see more and wider social debate with regard to supporting or objecting to organismic cloning.

One topic on which Klotzko is very strong and clear about her views is the uniqueness of the individual. This topic surfaces throughout the book, but comes out most strongly in the final chapter,

"There's only one Mona Lisa". Klotzko rightly acknowledges the not-so-well-understood role of the environment in shaping an individual with a specific genome. That is why she also repeatedly refers to the film *The Boys from Brazil* (1978), which also made the point that genetic and physical copying is not an absolute determinant of social and historical copying.

Considering that we do understand the uniqueness of individuals on the basis of genetics, epigenetics and chance, why are we then either so afraid of or fascinated by the possibilities of human cloning? One of the reasons for our fears lies in our belief, mistaken in my view, that human beings are essentially sinful and, hence, evil. Therefore, given the chance and the tools to do evil, man will do it. Is that really so? Whatever the historical precedence set by certain individuals and/or groups of tyrants, we must abandon this destructive notion about the whole human race. The other reason for the fascination for having a clone of our own may also be based in fear—the fear of death. Realizing that spiritual immortality is purely a matter of religious faith, that creative immortality is limited to a few genius minds, and that physical immortality is unrealistic, then having a clone of our own is a kind of virtual immortality that either feeds our ego or pacifies our fears. Arlene Klotzko would, however, like us to accept and take pride in the fact that we are all unique, implying special and worthy, and that "... there will never EVER be another like you." Read her book and think about it.

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