

OPINION PAGES

Our VIEW

Black sheep? Endless possibilities with technology to clone

Hello, Dolly. Not the play, but the cloned sheep. Dolly, a seven-month-old sheep, is helping usher in a new era in science — bringing humanity one step closer to the science-fiction “reality” of cloning.

On Saturday, Ian Wilmut at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh, Scotland — working with the biotechnology company PPL Therapeutics — announced that he and his team had succeeded in cloning a sheep.

And according to experts, the last physical barrier to reproductive technology has now been breached.

Wilmut and his team managed to remove a mammary cell from the udder of an adult sheep, fuse it to an egg from a ewe and clone the original sheep.

The next step for the team and those who follow will be cloning transgenic sheep — animals whereby insertion of a gene or genes into its DNA can create one that has more meat, more wool and can make more money for sheep herders — all the while lowering the market price for consumers.

Now the public must come to grips with this new and fascinating development.

Although cloning a living being such as a sheep is considered creation, we must realize that throughout the history of humanity, we have tinkered with the natural order of the world. Whether it be producing hybrid crops or inbreeding animals to give rise to stock with particular qualities, we, in essence, are “creators.”

Cloning a person and cloning a sheep — although potentially similar in technique — would entail major differences.

The uproar here is the potential misuse of the technology to “bring back” the dead or clone a living person. But the reality is that even if such blatantly unethical techniques were attempted, they would not result in the creation of the “same” human.

Cloning a new Abraham Lincoln would not bring back a great American leader. The new person would not have had the same experiences and interactions that made Lincoln who he was.

If it's even possible to clone a human, doing so would only create a being who resembled Lincoln physically; his personality would be dictated by many other factors.

And even if the technology to clone becomes widespread or falls into the hands of those who would misuse it, those who fear a thousand Adolf Hitlers or dictators with supersoldiers running rampant can rest easy. Clones would still have to be born and grow up, just like children from natural fertilization. “Nurture” should count for at least as much as “nature.”

The ability to clone will certainly change the way we view the world and ourselves. But rather than dredging up thoughts of a “brave new world” and scaring ourselves — after all, this is not another Manhattan Project, designed to destroy an enemy — we should realize the potentially positive and fascinating benefits we all stand to gain.

Mehsling's VIEW



DN LETTERS

Off the Beam

The Daily Nebraskan's coverage of the men's gymnastic team has been pathetically small this year. Why is it that other sports get large articles detailing their progress and record while the men's gymnastic team gets a ½-inch blurb or is tacked on to the very end of an article concerning the women's gymnastic team?

UNL and Francis Allen have one of the best teams in the nation this year, not to mention a great tradition of excellence. I would appreciate, and expect, a little fairness in the DN's coverage of UNL athletic teams.

Simeon Bukacek
sophomore
history

No Revelation Here

Gee Cliff Hicks, I must say you are a gifted writer. You kept my interest throughout your column (DN, Monday) even though you failed to make any grand point.

Let's see now: Words have meanings — we can easily strip the meanings away so that we weren't offended — because words are just words and it's the “idea behind them” that causes all the trouble.

Hey Cliff, I heard somewhere that 1+1=2. No really, it was quite a revelation. Sorry Cliff, but it's just that all you did was state the obvious. Although, there was one thing that you're really screwy about. You think if we remove an offensive word or accept it as just a word then the idea no longer “has anything to hide behind.” Ha ha ha ha ha, not funny Cliff.

So Cliff, you saying that makes it OK? Y' know, if the words you say are individually accepted they can still be put together to offend me. The “idea” is the whole point. It's far more offensive for me to



MATT HANEY/DN

hear “blacks are inferior to whites” than “blacks are no good n*ggers.”

I fear words no more than I fear Rainbow Brite. But I'm immensely afraid to live in a world among those who are irrational, illogical, uncaring, racist, etc. If they didn't swear it wouldn't make a difference. If we accepted all words, it wouldn't make a difference. But it matters when we accept such ridiculous “ideas” and put them to practice.

Cliff, you seem like a smart guy. What I've said is no more obvious than what you said in your column. However, I think it's more important to analyze people's ideas than the means (words) for which they choose to express them.

Jason Flatowicz
sophomore
undecided

Praise be the Word

I hate to rain on Cliff Hicks' astonishing “discovery,” but some of us did figure out before our sophomore year of college that words carry only the power that we ascribe to them.

I won't linger on that, though. Nor will I dwell on the pompousness with which Hicks proffers his pseudo-profundities: “So it is here I remove the smoke and allow you to see the tricks of my trade ...” Jesus be praised, thank you so much, Cliff. Instead, I'll just explain where he's wrong.

Hicks does have a few things right. Like I said, it's true that we give the abstract symbols called words their power. And if you follow that premise to its logical conclusion, then yes, offensive words don't have power over anyone who won't ascribe to them.

But offensive concepts still will carry power, and I find it offensive that Hicks dares to say, “I am a writer by trade,” and then, two paragraphs later, “They are ... only words, folks.”

It's offensive because, as a writer, Hicks of all people should appreciate the power of words.

Words communicate concepts, emotions. Words are one of the best ways we have of articulating our anger, fear, joy, disappointment. When an offensive word is used properly, it conveys a potent, potent message because of its connotations. At the other end of the spectrum, very positive words — like “love” — will convey very powerful messages when they're used properly.

Hicks needs to understand that if there's a problem with offensive words, it's not that they shock people — that's their job. It's that overuse drains them of their power.

In closing, Cliff, our freedom isn't limited, as you say, because we surrender power to our language. We give the power to our words; we just have to stop abusing them. And our giving power to our words grants us the freedom of a wide range of ways to express ourselves — joyfully, angrily and even pompously.

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