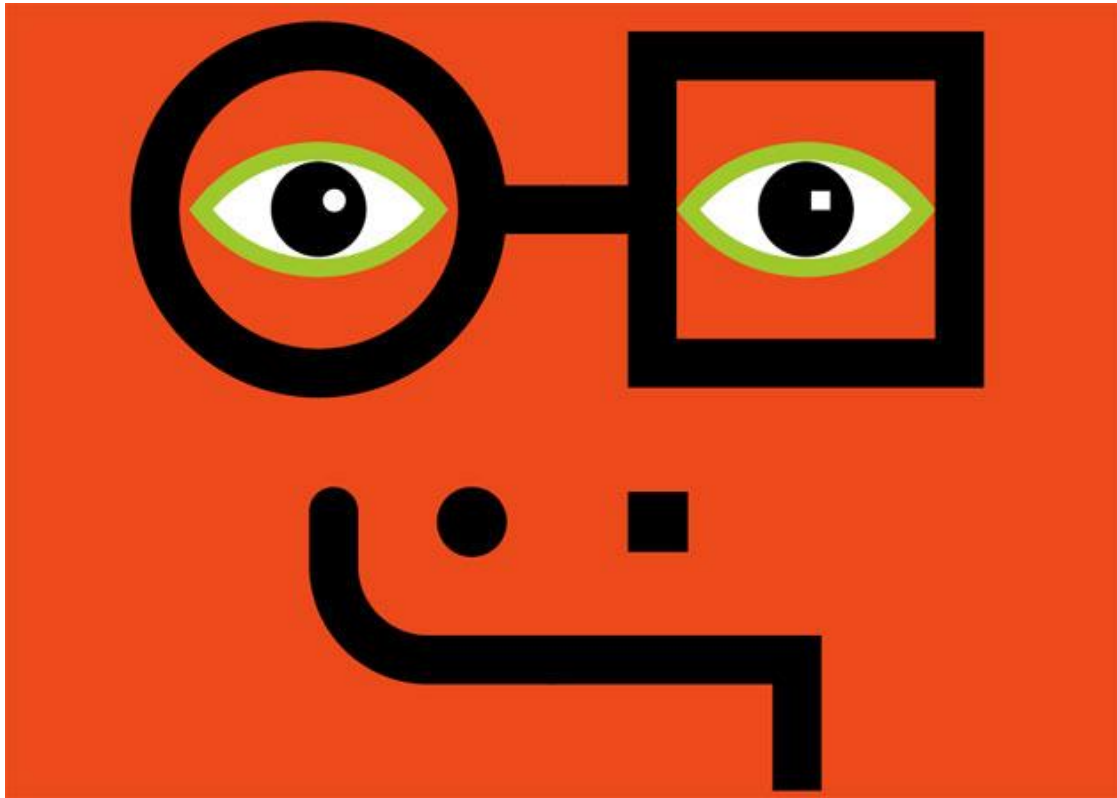


## HUMAN CLONING



*Illustration: Michael Gericke*

**Human clones**, it is widely assumed, would be monstrous perversions of nature. Yet chances are, you already know one. Indeed, you may know several and even have dated a clone. They walk among us in the form of identical twins: people who share exact sets of DNA. Such twins almost always look alike and often have similar quirks. But their minds, experiences, and personalities are different, and no one supposes they are less than fully human. And if identical twins are fully human, wouldn't cloned people be as well?

Suppose scientists could create a clone from an adult human: It would probably be more distinct from its predecessor than most identical twins are from each other. A clone from a grown-up would have the same DNA but would come into the world as a gurgling baby, not an instant adult, as in sci-fi. The clone would go through childhood and adolescence with the same life-shaping unpredictability as any kid.

The eminent University of Chicago ethicist Leon Kass has argued that human cloning would be offensive in part because the clone would "not be fully a surprise to the world." True, but what child is? Almost all share physical traits and mannerisms with their parents. By having different experiences than their parents (er, parent) and developing their own personalities, clones would become distinct individuals with the same originality and dignity as identical twins—or anyone else.

Others argue that cloning is "unnatural." But nature *wants* us to pass on our genes; if cloning assists in that effort, nature would not be offended. Moreover, cloning itself isn't new; there have been many species that reproduced clonally and a few that still do. And there's nothing intrinsically unnatural about human inventions that improve reproductive odds—does anyone think nature is offended by hospital delivery made safe by banks of machines?

This does not necessarily make human cloning desirable; there are complicated issues to consider. Initial mammalian cloning experiments, with sheep and other species, have produced many sickly offspring that die quickly. Could it ever be ethical to conduct research that produces sick babies in the hope of figuring out how to make healthy clones? And clones might be treated as inferiors, rendering them unhappy.

Still, human cloning should not be out of the question. In vitro fertilization was once seen as depraved God-playing and is now embraced, even by many of the devoutly religious. Cloning could be a blessing for the infertile, who otherwise could not experience biological parenthood. And, of course, it would be a blessing for the clone itself. Suppose a clone is later asked, "Are you glad you exist even though you are physically quite similar to someone else, or do you wish you had never existed?" We all know what the answer would be.

What would the downsides be?

Have you seen the movie "The Island" ?

What were clones used for there? What did the movie suggest about this?