

Opinion

Science fiction of immortality now non-fiction

It is odd that a most important moment in history passed with little fanfare. In an age when musings of Madonna generate global discussions an announcement of unparalleled significance gets by us with a notice in the paper and a few editorial cartoons.

The successful cloning of a Scottish sheep and two monkeys from the U.S. has the potential to be the greatest turning point in human evolution.

What does a sheep and a pair of twin monkeys mean for the human species? The cloning of these mammals renders sex obsolete - males are obsolete. Fully one half of



Viewpoint

Andrew Mair

our population is no longer biologically necessary. The fundamental act of procreation, of reproduction, has been neutered by these scientists.

Cloning has as many ethical and moral implications as any creation of humankind. The potential for unbelievable evil is now apparent. Worried about terrorists getting their

hands on nuclear or biological weapons? Add a cloned army to your list of nightmares.

As well, cloning renders death in the traditional sense null and void. True, you would still be dead while your clone walked around, but the science fiction of immortality just got moved to the non-fiction shelf.

The process has plenty of proper and good applications. Disease fighting and organ transplant were brought into the realm of the 21st century. Cloning could also assist childless couples looking to have a baby.

As is usually the case, our technology has far outstripped our ethical and moral pronouncements on

such things.

We are just now beginning to understand the impacts electricity has on our bodies and the disasters polymers and plastics are wreaking on our molecular structure.

We are a species which is vain enough to put a man on the moon, to claim it is the chosen master of the universe, yet cannot come up with a common sense policy on smoking.

We are a species which has built the capacity to destroy the planet in a blinding flash, but cannot seem to find the will to feed the hungry.

Cloning has brought science fiction into the realm of reality - a long time before we are ready for it.



Great political invective is gone

Our Defence Minister Doug Young is developing quite a reputation for running his mouth. Young dismissed Quebec separatists as a "bunch of snot noses." He sneered at a Progressive Conservative opponent as "a faded pansy."

Then Doug Young really got nasty. Deborah Grey, a Reform MP from Alberta, was flailing away at the Liberals in what passes for debate on Parliament Hill. She called the Liberals "porkers." The defence minister cast an appraising eye over the amply-proportioned Ms. Grey and intoned that she was "more than a slab of bacon" herself.

There is a word for politicians like Doug Young. The word is 'amateur'.

There was a time when giants walked the earth. Giants with names like Churchill, Kennedy and Diefenbaker.

In a debate, any one of those gentlemen would have inhaled Doug Young like a cocktail canape.

He wouldn't have lasted ten seconds with the guy who called King Henry VIII "...a pig, an ass, a dunghill, the spawn of an adder, a basilisk, a lying buffoon, a mad fool with a frothy mouth...a lubberly ass...a frantic madman..."

Now who said that - Rush Limbaugh? Don Cherry? Nope. It was Martin Luther - nearly 500 years ago.

American public figures have a gift for denunciation too. Check what a 19th century U.S. congressman by the name of John Randolph had to say about a fellow politician:

"He was a man of splendid abilities, but utterly corrupt. Like rotten mackerel by moonlight, he both shines and stinks."

And then there's the British. I have a theory as to why the Brits are so relatively civilized in public. Aside from aberrations like Soccer Louts, the British tend to be well-behaved and non-demonstrative in social situations. I think that's because they're so busy disemboweling each other with words. The Brits are masters of verbal violence. Listen to Benjamin Disraeli describing Sir Robert Peel:

"The Right Honourable Gentleman's smile is like the silver fittings on a coffin."

On Lord John Russell:
"If a traveler were informed

The Tribune
Weekender Edition
A Metroland Community Newspaper
PATRICIA PAPPAS, Publisher
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<http://www.yorkregion.com>

The Tribune, published every Wednesday and Saturday, is one of the Metroland Printing, Publishing and Distributing group of community newspapers which includes: Ajax Pickering News Advertiser, Alliston Herald, Barrie Advance, Brampton Guardian, Burlington Post, CityParade, Collingwood/Wasaga Beach Connection, East York Mirror, Etobicoke Guardian, Georgetown Independent/Acton Free Press, Kingston This Week, Lindsay This Week, Midland-Penetanguishene Mirror, Milton Canadian, Champion, Mississauga News, Newmarket/Aurora Era-Banner, Northumberland News, North York Mirror, Oakville Beaver, Orillia Today, Oshawa-Whitby Clarington/Port Perry This Week, Peterborough This Week, Richmond Hill/Thornhill/Vaughan Liberal, Scarborough Mirror, Today's Sentinel. Contents not to be reproduced without written permission from the publisher. Permit #1247. The publisher reserves the right to refuse or classify any advertisement. Credit for advertisement limited to space error occupied.

The Weekender is a member of the Ontario Press Council. **CCAO Inc.**

Basic Black

Arthur Black

that such a man was the Leader of the House of Commons, he might begin to comprehend how the Egyptians worshipped an insect."

On an Irish agitator:
"A systematic liar and a beggarly cheat; a swindler and a poltroon...He has committed every crime that does not require courage."

Then of course there was Winston Churchill. God help the wretch who felt the lash of his tongue. Such as Clement Atlee - "A modest man, with much to be modest about."

Stafford Cripps - "There but for the grace of God, goes God."

Neville Chamberlain - "In the depths of that dusty soul there is nothing but abject surrender."

Canada's own John Diefenbaker got off more than a couple of haymakers in his time. It was Dief who described the Liberals as "the flying saucers of politics. No one can make head nor tail of them and they are never seen in the same place twice."

He's also the one who described the then-Premier of Quebec, the somewhat self-important Jean Lesage, as "the only person I know who can strut sitting down."

Dief's gone now...more's the pity. I'd love to hear what he'd have to say about Parizeau and Bouchard.

Editor's mail

Cutting prep time hurts the students

To the Editor,

I would like to respond to Jo Ann Stevenson's Viewpoint article entitled A strike is not the way to teach children, specifically her comment regarding prep time: "the public has difficulty seeing the need for a strike on this issue when teachers seem to have much more spare time than the average working person."

Teachers have not done a very good job educating the public about their profession. The first thing the general public thinks about is the holidays, and yes, having the summer off is terrific. But, if you're thinking about becoming a teacher for the holidays, you won't last until Christmas. You'll have your first nervous breakdown around Thanksgiving.

How do teachers decide what to teach? The curriculum is not laid out in such a way that daily lesson plans are given to each teacher. Each grade has hundreds of performance criteria (skills) which are to be mastered (learned) by the students by

the end of each grade. It is up to each teacher to figure out how to teach these skills. The teacher has to find and make all the resources. The teacher has to create and conduct the assessment for each performance criteria.

One of the resources at a teacher's disposal is the curriculum documents from the board, which consists of a 4-inch binder for each subject. These binders are full of skills to be taught and some suggestions, but have very few concrete, student-friendly activities.

Prep time is necessary during the school day because there are some things that can't be done at home. We now have "portfolios" for each student. These take up three boxes in my class. Shall I lug them home each evening, or can I do some marking on my prep?

Cutting prep time ultimately hurts the students.

T. Cariglia-Bull
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