

Gene Ethics Charter

Archive May 1993.

I have no further comment to make about the identity of the British scientist who confessed to me that he had cloned human embryos, speculating that they might one day be useful for developing spare parts.

This conversation is described in *The Genetic Revolution*.

"The embryos all died at an early stage. Similar work has been conducted since by American embryologists. The conversation was private and confidential, I gave my word I would not disclose his identity before he was willing to talk, and keeping my word is a matter of integrity however much I may disagree with what he was doing. The circumstances and nature of the conversation left me in no doubt that he was telling me the truth. The conversation took place prior to the process becoming illegal.

"We need to see this scientist's claim in context. Animal cloning has been going on for over thirty years and making new animals with new genes is also now quite routine, with over 80,000 transgenic animals born in UK laboratories every year, some containing human genes.

"Cloning is just one example of the great power of gene technology, a technology we urgently need to treat or cure diseases such as diabetes, cystic fibrosis, cancer or AIDS, and to help feed the growing world population. However gene technology raises urgent questions of safety and ethics.

"For example, we now have the ability to make viruses in the laboratory which could turn out to be even more dangerous than HIV. In recent experiments we have seen how unexpected mutations can occur.

"We urgently need a Gene Charter so that much-needed research can continue with proper safeguards. Such a charter will need adoption throughout the EC and by other nations to be effective.

The full text of this charter is to be found in "The Genetic Revolution" published by Kingsway. The Gene Charter was the subject of Early Day Motion 2057 in the House of Commons, signed by MPs from all Parties.

1. Testing of all new [foods](#) by law.
2. Labelling of new [foods](#) "Containing products of gene technology" so consumers can choose.
3. Heavy penalties for unapproved environmental release of genetically modified organisms, whether accidental or deliberate, without having to prove damage or negligence.
4. Permits required in advance for all virus modifications, particularly where these viruses are being used to infect animal, plant or human cells.
5. Ban on further biological warfare research.
6. Ban on attempts to alter human cells where the effects could be passed on to future generations.
7. Limits on genetic screening a) ban on selective destruction of embryos or fetuses without desired [genetic](#) characteristics in the normal range. b) gene screening of adults and children only where benefit to the individual and at person's/guardian's request. c) ban on human cloning. d) gene therapy regulated with long term monitoring by an independent body, and only offered to those with serious genetic disease.
8. Restrictions on the amount of human genetic code given to an animal and care for animal

welfare so new breeds are healthy by constitution.

9. Public access to and ownership of information, with representation on important committees. Public registers of gene modifications in progress. Patents should not be given for sections of normal human genes, nor for human beings, nor for genetically altered animals or plants. Single cell organisms such as insulin producing bacteria should have patent protection.

10. Submission of gene activity to ethical review respecting the need to safeguard the future of our world and the uniqueness of human life. Some parts of this charter are already covered by existing UK legislation, or by voluntary agreements which need tightening.