

Altering Genetics

(Just because we can, should we?)

The changes that we make now in the world will fan out and multiply down the river of time. Should such changes occur for short term profitability or should they be limited to those cases where the benefits markedly outweigh the risks?

In breeding roses for color, they have lost some of their smell. By genetically altering some plants, we have made them more susceptible to disease. Giving BCG injections to cows to produce more milk has made them more prone to infection and the composition of the milk is likely altered. The preservatives and additives in our food have probably decreased the male sperm count. You never get all good and no bad. The problem is we are only looking at the good a genetic intervention can have and no worrying about the immediate and long term ramifications.

Mother Nature took millions, actually billions of years to get the world working fairly harmoniously through subtle changes and intricate adjustments. If the good of a change outweighed the negative then that change was perpetuated, otherwise it would have been a dead end. Mankind though has made more irreversible changes in the last 100 years than nature has in the last million. What will be the ramifications?

By paying the poor more for every child they had, we increased and perpetuated poverty. The use of C-sections has allowed women to perpetuate the genetic trait of small pelvic outlet to their offspring, possibly to a point in the future where a certain percentage of the female population can not deliver a baby vaginally. Abortion too, is altering the genetic makeup of the population, though many would say for the better (less poor, crime). I personally feel that abortion is based on racism (Margaret Saner) and that even though some may be able to point out a benefit or two, its acceptance diminishes the value of life and contributes to the moral decay of society. Who are we to say someone should live or die? (By the way, a fetus is a distinct living human being. Science has never said otherwise. Roe vs. Wade was not an issue of when the baby was a human being but when it had the legal rights of personhood. Therefore, though it may legally acceptable, it can never be honestly argued that it is morally right).

Though it is in man's nature and often to his benefit to alter his environment, are we going to far? My answer is a resounding "maybe," but more importantly a definite "yes" to going too fast. We are now at the point were one misstep can destroy the human race whether it be by nuclear holocaust, genetic/biologic alterations, or other means. Those changes which have an immediate negative impact can be quickly stopped, but even more dangerous are those which only have a subtle or yet unknown negative impact. Will we be too late in recognizing it?

The majority of Great Minds throughout time have been plagued with and yet maybe stimulated by illnesses which have a genetic basis. Should we have discarded these "defects." Depression has plagued the likes of Socrates, Lincoln, "Sherlock Holmes," Poe, Hemingway, the Barrymores, Nikola Tesla, Rush Limbaugh, Kurt Cobaine, and myself to name just a few. Edison and to a lesser extent Einstein and myself had/have ADD; Martin Luther had depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and possibly schizophrenia; Einstein had social anxiety disorder and possibly depression. Vincent VanGogh had schizophrenia; Helen Keller was deaf and blind; and the list goes on and on. In fact, the majority of successful entrepreneurs are likely to have some form of bipolar disorder. Would the world have been a better place without these people? Who among us is ready to say that we should toss out such zygotes/fetuses with such genetic abnormalities without fully knowing what effect that gene has on the being lifetime as a whole. Out of struggle comes creation. A placid life yields little while a life with conflict and struggle can cause one to rise above it and do great things. Just because we have the ability to select/alter the genetics of a living organism does not mean that we should do it.

Every time we alter the natural state, we are making a wish upon the monkey's paw. For every alteration we make in the natural state, we are opening up countless implications of yet unknown effects. I would rather be a blind man stepping forward cautiously, rather than a fool stepping forward blindly. May we be wise.

JP Siepmann, Editor

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Email: mail@journaloftheoretics.com

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