**Issue 12: Is Genetic Enhancement an Unacceptable Use of Technology**

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11/27/2012

1 | **Author and major thesis of the YES side...**

The **Yes** case is presented by political philosopher Michael J. Sandel. His major thesis states “manipulate our own nature...make ourselves better than well...induced a kind of moral vertigo...” He feels that it is a “…flawed attempt at human mastery, and banishes appreciation of life as a gift.” (Levine, 2012)

2 | **Author and major thesis of the NO side...**

The **No** case is presented by Physician Howard Trachtman. His major thesis states “…enhancement as a never-ending quest for health…”, is a good thing the medical community should embrace. (Levine, 2012)

3 | **Two facts presented by each side...**

The **Yes** side presented supporting facts citing the “off-label” use for growth hormones among children that are less than their average percentile, but not as a result of any medical problem, i.e. simply to make their kids taller for social/economical reasons. Another is the quest to adapt research that helps Alzheimer’s for use in the general public as “cognition enhancers” that would again increase the advantage of those that can afford over those that cannot.

The **No** facts essentially state that just because a treatment becomes available, does not mean it will quickly latch on by humanity. Most people are generally suspicious and cautious of new medical advances. I personally know people still not willing to try Lasik for fear of some adverse side effect, even though Lasik has been around for many years.” Another cited fact is “The abuse of erythropoietin by athletes does not detract from the qualitative improvement in the lives of patients with end stage renal disease who are treated with this drug”. (Levine, 2012)
The Yes side opinion was the concern for two classes, and that human enhancing treatments would be expensive; therefore only those who can afford them can have them. Another is that choosing such a course towards perfection is assault on the appreciation of “life as a gift” and “deprives parents of humility and sympathies”. (Levine, 2012)

The No side emphasized that we must not fear or limit because we do not know what the future will bring. Events like 9/11 show we will always have something to fear and try to overcome. Another opinion was to the effect that we would not try to prevent the self-improvement that most people seek via education, exercising, meditation etc. why should the enhancement at a genetic level be any different.

For many who may not share a theological view that life is a gift. Somewhere there may be a body of people that do not share that view, and to them an “Island of Dr. Monroe” is an acceptable use of technology. By simply abstaining from research on such moral grounds (e.g. halting stem cell research) will merely put at a disadvantage those believing “life is a gift”.

The “hormonal arms-race” is something that happens even without genetic enhancement. Prejudices not only affect this, but preferences also. Most tall people tend to marry others of their height and each succeeding generation continue to increase in height. This eventually causes problems for society as well e.g. taller public door and ceiling height requirements. Would a public mandate that all future children meet a maximum of 6 ft (min 5’8”) via gene selection for the purpose of homogenization of public infrastructure be of benefit for all?

The assumption that acceptance of genetic enhancement would not lead to a Pandora’s Box of problems. It cannot be ever assumed that human enhancing technology will not be abused to the point or that we can keep a lid on it.

His statement of “if viewed as a hard wired human trait that we all engage in.” This would only be the ideal, as invariably there will always be differences in acceptable standards for enhancement. E.g. one region of the world may state enhancement “x” is acceptable, whereas that crosses the line to another region.
I felt that the Yes position had the greatest amount of empirical support. The data regarding the moral implications of genetic enhancement did make me think twice. I also felt the passion of Yes position came through more to sway the reader.

Even though I believe in genetic enhancement, I did have a tendency to feel that Trachtman’s position may have had biased overtones as he seemed to support his views with less philosophical or supportive real-world examples. I would assume his bias would stem from a physician background that would lend to an open mind regarding all things genetic.

I take sides with the No position as I feel there will always be abusers of genetic enhancement for superficial, narcissistic and material gain. However, there are still many others who would want to change their height, weight, strength, skin, hair, eye color simply to overcome a lifetime of insecurity, discomfort or just plain change. Would it not be just as beneficial to them as Prozac? No one would fault them for bleaching hair, color contacts, implants, platform shoes, tanning or a lifetime of yo-yo dieting. Genetic enhancement for any of these is simply more permanent and more authentic.