

A personal opinion on biomedicine 10537

Engineering



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BUSTER**

Like all other great moral issues, there is no permanent consensus as to whether genetic engineering is to our benefit or not. Views from two diametrically opposed standpoints have been given; and even in the same field, the degree of opinions varies. This leads one to wonder: Is there no middle ground?

Science has made tremendous progress in the past century alone. Yet, the age-old conflict remains " the struggle between science and ethics, the tension between what can be and what should be, the battle between what is possible and what is right." Caught in the midst of the flurry of arguments, we have to make a clear distinction between the black, the white and the grey. Like President Bill Clinton of the United States of America states, " Any discovery that touches upon human creation is not simply a matter of scientific inquiry. It is a matter of morality and spirituality as well."

Being mere humans, we encounter slippery ground all too often. Thus, there is an urgent need for us to tread cautiously. We have to carefully sort through the jumble of right and wrong, of good and evil; we have to search for what our values are, and where our ethics stem from. Only then can we be sure of our convictions and our stand on the issue of genetic engineering.

Both sides have engaged in a fast and furious debate on the merits of genetic engineering. After a detailed review, I am inclined to go with the " Wait and see" attitude. We cannot substitute human judgement for natural selection, for we are fallible. However, we can perhaps assist Nature by hastening the process. I am not in favour of destroying the environment in which we live, nor am I particularly prone to the idea that scientists are

exploring genetic engineering because they have a desire to "play God". Rather, I stake my belief in the hope that scientists are working to build a brighter future for all of us.

While I realize that genetic engineering could pose a very real threat to humanity if abused, I do not feel as if we are "sowing the seeds of our destruction." Then again, the creators of nuclear power and bombs probably had no such reservations either.

Studies have proven that genetic engineering poses serious risks to the human health and to the environment. It seems nothing but detrimental to humankind. Some even go so far as to suggest that genetic engineering will cause us to "mortgage the biosphere, seriously compromise life on the planet and even risk what it means to be a human being." Yet, just as much evidence has surfaced, arguing for the benefits of genetic engineering, in a multitude of areas like the agricultural, chemical, environmental, pharmaceutical and health sectors. Scientists have claimed that it could very well be the "savior" of our future. Already, genetic engineering has saved dozens of lives, and all but wiped out some potentially fatal hereditary diseases.

I do not deny that the potential for the ruination of the human race exists. As with every other scientific breakthrough, genetic engineering could very well set the stage for another weapon of mass destruction to be created, this time in the aspect of biowarfare. It is not uncommon for people to be convinced that "it is very likely that in attempting to perfect the human species, we will succeed in engineering our own destruction." It is immensely

conceivable that in the wrong hands, this seriously powerful tool can become a deadly and lethal weapon, annihilating not only the bad, but also the good, perhaps eliminating the diversity of life itself.

Despite this substantial threat, only great risks reap great rewards. " People are eager for the benefits, but fear the possible danger." How can we ever hope to achieve the impossible, when fear keeps us prisoners? How can we hope for a more ideal future for humanity if we dare not take a leap of faith?

While I strongly urge researches to continue the excellent progress, I think that they have to take care not to be remiss about precautions. Even in this specialized field, scientists have warned against the harmful effects genetic engineering could have. If they are so worried, should not the public be doubly so? While extolling the virtues of genetic engineering, we have to proceed with caution and not overestimate our ability to control it, or its ability to turn on us. It would be foolhardy for us to charge full speed ahead, heedless of the risks, unmindful of the dangers. Instead, for genetic engineering to achieve its full capabilities, we have to steer through a painstakingly chartered course, establishing ground rules from the start and strictly enforced guidelines. This is so science and ethics can finally have the golden opportunity to work hand in hand.

To date, many discoveries in genetic engineering has paved the way for the time when we can possible eliminate the obstacles deterring our species from living an improved life. In genetic engineering, we glimpse a whole new world of possibilities. Its door beckons welcomingly, inviting us to step forward. Yet, we need to understand where to draw the line, where to place

the boundaries. It is not only for a certain group to decide, but together, as humanity, shall we see this thing through.

Even while we "lend Nature a hand", we have to respect the intrinsic and inherent value of creation, the innate sanctity of life. Even while striding toward an idealistic future we have to conform to the fundamental principles and ethics that drive our morality. In no instance should we compromise our integrity for personal gains, for it is for the greater good that we venture into this unknown territory. Perhaps one day in the distant future, our legacy to our children will be a world that although not perfect, is very much enhanced.