

Genetic engineering essay sample



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Were “ Factor X” absent from human beings, all would be deprived of the “ essential quality underneath that is worthy of a certain minimal level of respect” (Fukuyama 149). “ Factor X” is the key factor in human beings that justify our equality. Francis Fukuyama categorizes “ accidental characteristics” by skin color, social class and wealth, gender, cultural background, and even one’s natural talents as nonessential, yet he states “ we make decisions on whom to befriend, whom to marry or do business with, or whom to shun at social events based on these secondary characteristics” (Fukuyama 150).

During earlier periods in history, people believed Factor X only belonged to a certain category of beings, pertaining to “ certain sexes, economic classes, races, and tribes and people with low intelligence, disabilities, birth defects, and the like” (Fukuyama 150), contrary to today’s belief that Factor X equally supports the human race, yet accounts for a lower level of dignity for those not considered human.

Christians argue that Factor X simply originates from God. According to Fukuyama, since man is created in the image of God, it entitles him to a higher level of respect of the rest of natural creation. Pope John Paul II expressed “ the human individual cannot be subordinated as a pure means of a pure instrument, either to the species or to society: he has value per se. He is a person. With his intellect and his will, he is capable of forming a relationship of communion, solidarity and self giving with his peers...It is by virtue of his spiritual soul that the whole person possesses such dignity even in his body” (Fukuyama 150). In other words, the ability for humans to express free will and forming relationships separate them from the animal

kingdom and other non human species. Philosophers like Kant on the other hand argue that Factor X is based on the “ human capacity for moral choice. That is, human beings could differ in intelligence, wealth, race, and gender, but all were equally able to act according to moral law or not”, meaning human beings dignity came from their free will, that is, the “ ability to transcend natural determinism and the normal rules of causality” (Fukuyama 151).

Scientists might argue our sense of “ free will” might be an illusion and that all human decision making can conclusively be traced back to materialistic influences. Ultimately, although “ the human decision making process may be more complex than that of other animals, there is no sharp dividing line that distinguishes human moral choice from the kinds of choices that are made by other animals” (Fukuyama 151). Darwin’s theory also dismisses the idea that humans possess these special “ essences” and what seems to be the essence of a species is just an “ accidental” by-product of a random evolutionary process (Fukuyama 152).

David Hull believes human nature is not anything special because it is accidental in a way. “ I do not see why the existence of human universals is all that important...the distributions of these particular characters is largely a matter of evolutionary happenstance (Fukuyama 152), meaning it was purely coincidental. He also expresses that he would be extremely uneasy to base something as crucial as human rights on something as uncertain and unreliable as human nature. In other words he does not understand why humans must all be fundamentally similar to have rights (Fukuyama 153).

Although Hull is partially correct in stating “ we don’t all need to be the same in order to have rights”, we still need to be similar in one pivotal respect in order to have equivalent rights (Fukuyama 153). He brings up the topic of homosexuality and his concern that basing human rights on human nature will denounce homosexuals due to differentiation from the heterosexual norm, although he argues “ they are people too in some other respect that is more essential than their sexuality” (Fukuyama 153). He believes there is no reason to discriminate against them due to this common ground, or “ Factor X”.

Geneticist Lee Silver strongly encourages genetic engineering, arguing that we should seize this “ power” and not leave anything to chance as it has in the past. “ On what basis can we reject positive genetic influences on a person’s essence when we accept the rights of parents to benefit their children in every other way?” (Fukuyama 153). He bases this on the fact that parents control their children’s lives whether it is socially or environmentally influential, “ and in some cases, with the use of powerful drugs like Ritalin and Prozac” (Fukuyama 153). He believes we would not require a need for that if genetic engineering were in play. On the other hand, he is also “ nonetheless horrified at the possibility that it could be used to create a class of genetically superior people. He paints a scenario in which a class called the GenRich steadily improve the cognitive abilities of their children to the point that they break off from the rest of the human race to form a separate species” (Fukuyama 154).

It is likely that a form of hierarchy would arise, should genetic engineering become part of our society. “ Many of the grounds on which certain groups

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were historically denied their share of human dignity were proven to be simply a matter of prejudice, or else based on cultural and environmental conditions that could be changed” (Fukuyama 156). Fukuyama relates this idea to the apprehension that women were too illogical or impetuous to engage in politics, and that southern European immigrants had smaller sized heads and were less intelligent than those from northern Europe. These notions were overturned on the basis of empirical science. “ That moral order did not completely break down in the West in the wake of the destruction of consensus over traditional religious values should not surprise us either, because moral order comes from within human nature itself and is not something that has to be imposed on human nature by culture” (Fukuyama 156). The danger in this is that the large genetic differentiations between individuals will become scarce and clustered within certain distinct social groups.

The likelihood that biotechnology will allow the development of new genetic classes has been often taken into account and belittled by those mindful of the future. Fukuyama believes there will be two alternative courses of action. The first would be to simply outlaw the use of biotechnology to amplify human attributes. This method would prove troublesome, as the indication of enhancement may become too empowering to abandon, or it may be too difficult to actually enforce people from augmenting their children’s ability. “ At this point a second possibility opens up, which is to use that same technology to raise the bottom up...In the future, it may be possible to breed children who are more intelligent, more healthy, more “ normal.” Raising the

bottom is something that can only be accomplished through the intervention of the state”. (Fukuyama 159).

To an extent, a natural form of genetic engineering exists within the production of offspring, or genetic selection. The idea that “ successful people will tend to marry each other and...will pass on to their children better life opportunities”, assortative mating, increases the likelihood that favorable traits are to be inherited by one’s offspring (Fukuyama156-157). This idea naturally angers the less successful people because of the genetic traits they would not be able to compensate for their offspring. Though this form of mating optimizes the inheritance of favorable traits, it does not guarantee it. “ Today, many bright and successful young people believe that they owe their success to accidents of birth and upbringing but for which their lives might have taken a very different course. They feel themselves, in other words, to be lucky, and they are capable of feeling sympathy for people who are less lucky than they” (Fukuyama 156). The introduction of scientific genetic engineering would merely increase the probability that specific traits were to be inherited.

Madeleine Albright might argue for “ Factor X” and its existence within people. “ In Poland, John Paul II helped construct a bridge that would ultimately restore the connection between Europe’s East and West. For brick, he used words...” (Albright 3). The pope brought the Poles together with his powerful words instilled courage within them, leading to the revolution. “ Slowly at first, but with gathering momentum, the Pope’s listeners drew strength from one another. No longer were they separated into small, controllable groups; the communists’ obsession with isolating dangerous

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ideas had met its match”. His visits liberated Poland, brought down the Berlin Wall, reunited Europe, and transformed the face of the world (Albright 3). The Pope united the people with his insightful words and wisdom, and they all fought for a common purpose, aware of their cause. Fighting for a common cause, they share “ Factor X”.

Ultimately, although genetic engineering has its pros such as avoiding birth defects, creating overall smarter, genetically superior individuals, and preventing future hardships, it is also not considered normal and humane since up to this point in time human life has been successful through trial and error.

Works Cited

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