

# Ethics natural law on genetic engineering

[Engineering](#)



Natural Law is an absolute, Christian theory, and can be applied to this situation, so that followers of this theory know how to respond. The origins of Natural Law are found with the Stoics, and Aristotle, before being further developed by Cicero, and then finalized by SST. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century. It aims allow for flourishing - Dominance for Aristotle - in society, or ultimately perfection for Aquinas, by following the five Primary Precepts, as well as the Secondary Precept. These form the basis of the theory, and were brought together by Aquinas, when had formed the heron and coined the name 'Natural Law' .

Crucially, we also know that Aquinas said that " Everything has a purpose revealed In Its design", which plays an Important part in relating to medical ethics as, in this case, It Is tampering with our design Already we see that the idea of genetic engineering goes against Natural Law's ethics, as it is a deontological theory, and it would argue that our duty is not to try and change our design. The five Primary Precepts involve: the preservation of life; living peacefully in society; worshiping God; reproduction, and also the education of the nouns.

All of these should be remembered, although they arena all relevant to the topic of genetics. The Precepts that would be most relevant in relation to this topic would be the preservation of life, reproduction, and also worshiping God. Processes such as IF and stem cell research involve taking embryos and using them for experimentation, which Involves the destruction of the majority of them. Natural Law forms the basis for many Catholics ethics, and the Catholic Church also states that life begins at conception, supporting this

view with verses from the Bible such Psalm 39: 13, which says, " You knit me together in my mother's womb".

Similarly, this also applies to the Precept of reproduction. We can see that it is in our design to reproduce, as we have sexual organs, so it Aquinas states that it is part of our purpose to reproduce, however if embryos are being destroyed, we are preventing the fulfillment of this Precept. Furthermore, the Primary Precepts that states that we must worship God would go against genetic engineering, as we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1 : 26), and any kind of modification of ourselves, or our offspring, would be ' playing God as only He should dictate our design, including our genetic makeup.

This would not support any kind of genetic engineering, particularly a type of gene therapy, as this alters our genes, which form the very basis of our being. Natural Law also Includes Secondary Precepts, to help with the fulfillment of the Primary Precepts, and these Involve more flexible commands, but even these Precepts would not support genetic engineering, so one Secondary goods in this theory. He said that an apparent good, is an action that we think is oral, whereas that is simply Just the appearance of it, in reality it is not the true moral thing to do. A real good, is that which we should follow, and is not misguided.

Aquinas would say that if we were to use genetic engineering, such as genetic screening, we think that we are doing good, when in reality we are following an apparent good, and should in fact follow the real good, which is to not use any form of genetic engineering. This theory does teach about the Doctrine of Double Effect, although that does not really apply to this topic,

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and so in all, a follower of this theory would not support genetic engineering. On the other hand, another Christian theory is that of Situation Ethics, a theory that would have a much more relativistic view of genetic engineering.

This is a teleological, pragmatic theory that is based on unconditional love, not duty. It was formed by Joseph Fletcher, an Episcopal priest, in the 1950s, and he said that we should look at each situation individually, and look at what the 'most loving thing to do' would be. It is based on the four working principles: pragmatism, positivism, relativism and personalization. Essentially, it will look at an individual situation and ask what the best thing to do would be, based on these principles, so what we should see what the most practical, and positive action would be to take.

In relation to genetic engineering, it is much more likely that a Christian who follows Situation Ethics would support it, unlike one who supports Natural Law. Take for example the process of genetic screening, this involves the screening of genes of those in the population who are thought to be at risk of certain diseases, so that they may be able to make changes for later on in their life. A situation ethicist may well agree with this being carried out, as the most loving thing to do might be for somebody to find out if they are at risk of falling ill, so that they could take action to protect their family, or prolong their own life.

Similarly with stem cell research, Situation Ethics does not explicitly teach that life starts at conception, so the destruction of a number of embryos to possibly save many more lives, is moral in the eyes of this theory. However, this theory may not support genetically modified crops, as this could lead to

the exploitation of poorer farmers, which wouldn't be the most boning thing, although it depends on the situation. B. ) 'Religious ethics prevents progress in genetic engineering'.

Discuss Religious ethics are often thought of as being restrictive and reactionary when it comes to scientific progress, including the area of genetics. Bertrand Russell is known for saying that the Church is the ' principal enemy of moral progress ' , and this is supports the opinion of many people nowadays, in relation to science and religion. Natural Law is an example of an ethical theory that can be easily used in support of this statement, as by its absolute tauter it does not allow any kind of support for genetic engineering.

I would argue however that religious ethics still has a part to play in this area of science, which does not utterly prevent progress. In support of the statement, it is evident that many kinds of religious ethics stop the progress of science. For somebody who takes the Bible at its word, they would probably believe that life begins at conception, and that any type of genetic engineering would be committing murder, which they are told not to do in Exodus 20: 13, and so therefore this would not allow for any scientific regression. Contemporary atheists such as Professor Richard Adkins would argue hinder progress.

I would say that any theory that is based firmly on duty is one that will hinder progress in relation to genetic engineering. In most cases, such as Kantian Ethics or Natural Law, they are religious ethical theories. This is because theories that are based on duty usually have an absolute intrinsic

value on human life, not allowing any form of treatment towards that being - whether an embryo or adult. However, on the other hand, it could be argued that there are some religious ethics that allow, and even encourage progress in genetic engineering.

Situation ethics does of course aim to do the most loving thing, and often it could be claimed that to use one of the forms of genetic engineering, to prevent disease, or allow for fertilization. Joseph Fletcher was actually not against IF, and he saw a human being as a 'maker, selected and a designer', meaning that although there is an intrinsic value to human life, to allow a couple to ensure that their child would not be liable to certain diseases would be more loving than sparing some embryos. Similarly, the scholar Stephen J.

Gould is known for his 'Non-overlapping magisterial', that portrays the idea that science and religion separately explain the questions of 'How?' and 'Why?' Personally, I would agree with both of these views, that the most loving thing to do should be taken into account, and that science and religion can both coincide, as they do not answer the same questions. However, I would say that situation ethics can be too liberal, and there should still be a value on the life of a human, the question is when an embryo becomes a human.

Peter Singer, a preference utilitarian, states that it is not moral to use embryos for experimentation up until 14 days - which is the limit set by the law - as the gender of the embryo cannot be identified up to this point. Utilitarianism acts as an alternative to religious ethical theories, as it is a secular theory, which

allows it to be applied universally, and without bases in some sort of faith. This theory looks at the 'greatest good for the greatest number', and is teleological, so is more likely to support scientific progress, like in the area of genetic engineering, if it is best in the eyes of the majority.

In conclusion, I would say that generally, religious ethics do hinder scientific progress somehow. To an extent though, this is a good thing, as if people were to be too liberal with this area of science, we could be getting into the 'slippery-slope situation where it can slide towards designer babies etc. As I see it, there should be a value on human life, which in my opinion only starts a few weeks into the pregnancy, so after that there should be no form of genetic engineering inflicted on the being, which does not agree with most religious ethics, especially those of an absolute nature.