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The Ethics & Moral Issues of Genetic Engineering

Genetic engineering of humans and other organisms has become a very controversial topic as scientists break new ground faster than ever predicted. New technology and resources have helped, and now the race is on. As you may know, The Human Genome Project is in progress at this time and scientists are making a map of the human genetic structure. Now it is time for the public to get up to speed on the latest topics and issues.

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Genetics is the scientific study of heredity, which is the passing on of characteristics of living organisms from one generation to the next. Scientists now are investigating the function and structure of many human genes. One of the most serious and controversial issues now at hand concerns the application of techniques used with plants on humans. Many genetic ethics experts are weary of "perfect children" and "designer babies" because it is easily possible that in the very, very near future parents could pick and choose characteristics like eye, hair, and skin color. This type of human genetic engineering is usually referred to as a germ line gene

LEADY? OK

possible, and I am worried about it as well because there is no law or restriction against it. Should your employer have access to this information? I believe not. Your genetic information is you...it's what you're made of, and if it is exposed to people who you don't trust, then it can be exploited. I am concerned about "genetic blackmail."

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What would happen if tomorrow some freelance geneticist took some saliva off of a glass that President Clinton drank from? Next thing you know it's all over the media. Every genetic flaw that Mr. Clinton inherited could be used against him by his enemies, and he would be left genetically "naked." I do not think that this should ever be allowed to happen to anyone. Laws should be passed on what people can and can't do, otherwise sooner or later there is going to be an incident...probably sooner at judging from the long strides we are making forward on the scientific front.

There are countless more issues, but one that I find very important is the problem of overpopulation. If genetically passed on diseases are eliminated, then our life-span will definitely increase. Our children and their children's children will be healthier and happier, but at what cost? The world has just recently reached the 6 billion mark! How much more can mother nature stand? With pollution on the rise and natural resources straining

to keep up with us, I feel that we will slowly destroy our own beloved planet. But how can this be helped? Should births be limited to one per couple like in China right now? I think not, but if this problem isn't solved then we will be in trouble faster than predicted.

Finally, if it is possible to pay extra to have a genetically engineered child, then there will be a very big social issue at hand. Children of the rich and famous could be bigger, better, stronger, and smarter than those of the poor! We would accidentally create world segregation, because wealthy countries like the United States and Great Britain would have a population that is "superior" to that of less fortunate countries like Africa and India. This could be a huge problem, and as of now there are no real solutions, partly because the engineering will undoubtedly be very expensive and partly because we can't fully predict how things are actually going to unfold.

As you can see, the ethics and moral issues of genetic engineering are very important to us now. There is no time to wait, the people must make smart and logical decisions and petition the government to make laws to protect the common people. The scientific community is moving faster and faster; we must keep up with the pace, or the future of modern man will be in the hands of a talented few.

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