

advance, we remain confident in our ability to fix all the “bad” consequences—by regulation or by means of still newer and better technologies. Yet there is very good reason for shifting the American paradigm, at least regarding those technological interventions into the human body and mind that would surely effect fundamental (and likely irreversible) changes in human nature, basic human relationships, and what it means to be a human being. Here we should not be willing to risk everything in the naive hope that, should things go wrong, we can later set them right again.

Some have argued that cloning is almost certainly going to remain a marginal practice, and that we should therefore permit people to practice it. Such a view is shortsighted. Even if cloning is rarely undertaken, a society in which it is tolerated is no longer the same society—any more than is a society that permits (even small-scale) incest or cannibalism or slavery. A society

that allows cloning, whether it knows it or not, has tacitly assented to the conversion of procreation into manufacture and to the treatment of children as purely the projects of our will. Willy-nilly, it has acquiesced in the eugenic re-design of future generations. The humanitarian superhighway to a Brave New World lies open before this society.

But the present danger posed by human cloning is, paradoxically, also a golden opportunity. In a truly unprecedented way, we can strike a blow for the human control of the technological project, for wisdom, for prudence, for human dignity. The prospect of human cloning, so repulsive to contemplate, is the occasion for deciding whether we shall be slaves of unregulated innovation, and ultimately its artifacts, or whether we shall remain free human beings who guide our powers toward the enhancement of human dignity. The humanity of the human future is now in our hands.

2.5.3 THE CASE AGAINST PERFECTION

MICHAEL J. SANDEL

In this reading, Michael Sandel, professor of political philosophy at Harvard University, develops an answer to some of the hardest ethical questions raised by genetic engineering, particularly the use of this technology for human genetic enhancement. It is one thing, he argues, to employ genetic technologies to prevent or cure diseases or repair injuries but quite another to use them to produce children who are genetically advantaged by parental choice. Many people have moral qualms about performance-enhancing drugs in sports, but it is difficult to isolate exactly the ethical basis of these intuitions. Sandel examines and dismisses several plausible explanations for such qualms but finds each of these arguments insufficient. Instead, he argues that what is problematic about drug or genetic enhancement is that it represents “a Promethean aspiration to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires.” This desire to remake ourselves coexists with a countervailing value in the “giftedness of life”—that is, the appreciation that “our talents and powers

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