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978-0-521-76336-3 - Rationality and the Genetic Challenge: Making People Better?

Matti Häyry

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## RATIONALITY AND THE GENETIC CHALLENGE

Should we make people healthier, smarter, and longer-lived if genetic and medical advances enable us to do so? Matti Häyry asks this question in the context of genetic testing and selection, cloning and stem cell research, gene therapies and enhancements. The ethical questions explored include parental responsibility, the use of people as means, the role of hope and fear in risk assessment, and the dignity and meaning of life.

Taking as a starting point the arguments presented by Jonathan Glover, John Harris, Ronald M. Green, Jürgen Habermas, Michael J. Sandel, and Leon R. Kass, who defend a particular normative view as the only rational or moral answer, Matti Häyry argues that many coherent rationalities and moralities exist in the field, and that to claim otherwise is a mistake.

MATTI HÄYRY is Professor of Bioethics and Philosophy of Law at the University of Manchester and Professorial Fellow at the University of Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Finland.

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This series of books was founded by Cambridge University Press with Alexander McCall Smith as its first editor in 2003. It focuses on the law's complex and troubled relationship with medicine across both the developed and the developing world. In the past twenty years, we have seen in many countries increasing resort to the courts by dissatisfied patients and a growing use of the courts to attempt to resolve intractable ethical dilemmas. At the same time, legislatures across the world have struggled to address the questions posed by both the successes and the failures of modern medicine, while international organisations such as the WHO and UNESCO now regularly address issues of medical law.

It follows that we would expect ethical and policy questions to be integral to the analysis of the legal issues discussed in this series. The series responds to the high profile of medical law in universities, in legal and medical practice, as well as in public and political affairs. We seek to reflect the evidence that many major health-related policy debates in the UK, Europe and the international community over the past two decades have involved a strong medical law dimension. Organ retention, embryonic stem cell research, physician-assisted suicide and the allocation of resources to fund health care are but a few examples among many. The emphasis of this series is thus on matters of public concern and/or practical significance. We look for books that could make a difference to the development of medical law and enhance the role of medico-legal debate in policy circles. That is not to say that we lack interest in the important theoretical dimensions of the subject, but we aim to ensure that theoretical debate is grounded in the realities of how the law does and should interact with medicine and health care.

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## P R E F A C E

Would you like your child to be healthy, strong, and clever? Would you like your child to be similar to you? If you have a seriously sick child, would you like to have another child who could provide a cure? Many parents have answered 'Yes' to these questions, and a growing number of scientists are trying to accommodate their wishes by perfecting technologies for prenatal selection.

What about yourself? Would you like to have a cure for ailments that threaten your life and health? Would you like to live longer? Would you like to live forever? Many people have answered 'Yes' to these questions, too, and an equally growing number of scientists are trying to accommodate *their* wishes by developing stem cell treatments, gene therapies, and other new remedies.

Other people, including many parents-to-be, have objected to these developments. Some have claimed that choosing your child is an uncaring thing to do, because children should be accepted as they are. Others have stated that it is wrong to use infants or embryos as medicine. And some have argued that genetic alterations will change human life beyond recognition.

This is a book about genetic selection and therapies and their impact on our lives. It is also a book about the moral and political concerns that parents, scientists, public decision makers, and academic ethicists have regarding attempts to make better future people and to make existing people better. But most of all, this is a book about bioethical rationalities – on distinct and self-contained ways of thinking about emerging technologies and their applications to medicine and healthcare.

Meaningful ethical discussion on genetic selection and novel treatments is often hampered by deep disagreements concerning the nature of rationality and morality. People tend to think that only one rationality or one morality exists; that those who disagree with them are unreasonable or evil; and that all ethical issues can be solved once and for all by

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employing their own point of view. The point of this book is to show that rationalities vary, that disagreement is not necessarily an indication of stupidity or wickedness, and that although ethical issues have solutions within individual rationalities, they cannot be universally solved by intellectual arguments. People should listen to each other more and try to understand each other's ways of thinking. This would not automatically give us the right answers to our questions. But it could help us to get rid of some of the currently popular wrong answers, and possibly pave the way to finding better ones in the future.

This book has had a long gestation period. In a sense, I made preparations for it for a quarter of a century, since my graduation in philosophy in 1984. My first two topics in bioethics were beginning-of-life and end-of-life issues, which still loom large in selective and therapeutic choices. A few years later I turned my attention to genetics and participated in the debates on prenatal selection and the use of modified organisms, on cloning and stem cell research, and eventually on designer babies and impending immortality. During the past decade, I entertained half a dozen different ideas about a monograph on these developments and their ethical dimensions; but none of these survived the rapid scientific and political changes in the field.

My first serious attempt to put my thoughts together in the order in which they appear in this book was in spring 2006, when I taught a course on applied moral philosophy to postgraduate students at the University of Manchester. Thanks are due to them for many insightful comments. Encouraged by the experience, I then applied for funding to investigate things further and to have sufficient time for writing. As a result, my Manchester colleagues at the Centre for Social Ethics and Policy, the Institute for Science, Ethics and Innovation, and the School of Law granted me research leave for seven months in 2008. This was followed in 2009 by a fellowship at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, which enabled me to complete my research and finalise the book. My thanks are due to these institutions for their support.

I have also received institutional and financial support from the Department of Social and Moral Philosophy at the University of Helsinki, the Academy of Finland (projects 38996, 50040, and 105139), and the Wellcome Strategic Programme 'The Human Body, Its Scope and Limits' at the Institute for Science, Ethics and Innovation. I acknowledge all these instances of support with gratitude.

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PREFACE

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