

## Distribution of Genetic Resources and its Consequences

Human enhancement itself does not have any moral value; it is just a subject to social institutions and their organization. Proponents of this thesis often argue that the genetic revolution will lead to the division of society into two groups or even two different species, which is in their view morally reprehensible. I will approach this problem from a liberal standpoint, upholding that an unequal distribution of genetic resources can be legitimized in certain circumstances. I will then demonstrate that the prohibition of the genetic interventions is not a plausible solution and that the legalization of the genetic enhancement, especially the cognitive one, does not have to work exclusively for the advantage of the richest.

We already struggle with economic differences caused by the free market, and it is indisputable that some children are provided with better schooling and opportunities than others. Education at the most prestigious universities is an investment, and not everyone can afford this. But no one seems to postulate banning education. In the same manner, we should not prohibit genetic enhancement, but try to make it available to the greatest number of individuals. The first option is to allow humans to act freely hoping that self-regulation will resolve the problem of a potential inequality. The aim is to allow as much freedom as possible by educating the public and providing them with the basic understanding of genetic technologies (Maxwell 168). People, however, often make choices in their own self-interest; it is not to say that humans are essentially selfish; but, that our own needs are often more

clear to us than others. Hence the question that arises is whether an inequality, as an outcome of human actions, can be just? According to John Rawls' Difference Principle, an unequal distribution is justified if it benefits the least advantaged members of the society. We should aim to maximize an overall wellbeing, but with the special attention to the worst off. Rawls claims that the advantages of one group cannot outweigh the disadvantages of the others; maximizing human happiness regardless of any consequences is impermissible in a just society (Rawls 168). The genetic enhancement will be morally acceptable only if it benefits every social class. In the liberal tradition, the role of a government is to reassure protection; the state should be, therefore, obligated to monitor the genetic distribution and intervene if necessary. Many societies already follow this rule by regulating access to medical products and services. Political leaders, especially those from the left side of the political spectrum, should support social policies, making sure that genetic interventions are subsidized. Overall, inequalities caused by the genetic enhancement will perhaps remain for some time, but they will benefit the least well off.

Let us now consider what would result from a ban on genetic technologies. It seems to me that the premise the human enhancement leads to inequality does not support the conclusion advocating prohibition. (I am far from claiming that inequality does not constitute a problem or that it can be legitimized as a necessary outcome of human actions.) Nevertheless, if it turns out that the subsidization of the genetic enhancement does not decrease inequality, we should not conclude that this technology should be prohibited.

Making the enhancement technologies illegal is not a valid solution, because the demand will still exist regardless of any undertaken steps. Moreover, such a ban will make them available only on the black market without any limitations (Maxwell 168). Wealthy couples will be able to go abroad to enhance their children, in the same way as people already do in the event of abortion or euthanasia. Consequently, poor families will be left with no choice, but accepting what the natural lottery of genes has to offer.

The next question is whether genetic interventions would not result in financial inequality even if distributed by the government. But before questioning the results of the new technology it must be decided which characteristics to enhance first. The answer can be easily established by analyzing the current system. As a society, we recognize that knowledge is crucial for our development; for that reason many countries provide free or even compulsory education. For the sake of argument, I will be concerned with intelligence, but I recognize that there are other characteristics which improvement would work on similar argumentation. The claim that intelligence is a partly biological factor is definitely not baseless. According to Paul Cooijmans' article *IQ and Real-Life Functioning*, most people with an IQ below 90 are able to work only menial jobs which do not require any analytical skills. It follows that intellectual abilities can, at least to some degree, determine one's function in society; moreover, people's access to the higher education itself can be restricted

by their own biological limitations. The solution is to be found in the genetic enhancement, which could aim, if legalized, to equalize or improve human intelligence.

Many point out, as mentioned above, that unequal distribution of cognitive abilities will lead to an enormous economic disparity. This argument works on the assumption that one's ability to reason will make him or her more attractive on the market. One must, however, acknowledge that the market is not controlled by the best-trained workers; this vision seems to be utopian. *The World Inequality Report* shows that the top 1 percent in the United States owns about 20 percent of the national income. It is debatable whether their wealth is an outcome of hard labor or defects in the unjust system. Nonetheless, no matter which perspective is more persuasive, I would risk claiming that the greatest minds in the 21-century are not those driven by profit or owning the greatest amount of resources. Although I must agree that holding a college degree often leads to higher wages, but this factor does not, in any way, undermine the morality of intellectual enhancements. The relationship between a university and higher wages is not predicated only on intelligence, but also social connections and technical skills which genetic technology do not directly provide. On the other hand, many individuals with higher degrees cannot find themselves on the market and it is definitely not the case that the most intelligent people are the richest ones. Nowadays, intelligence is not always a sign of success, however, low IQ is almost necessarily an indicator of a low paid position. Intelligence may lead to higher wages, but there is no empirical evidence that it contributes to the division of society into two

antagonistic classes, even if such a division already exists. This line of reasoning leads me to the conclusion that rise in people's IQ will not improve the wellbeing of the upper class, but it will possibly create competition on the free market and, if regulated, help the worst off.

People enhance themselves when they take medications or even when they wear contact lenses. The problem is not an enhancement, but its political and social organization which I uphold can be morally permissible if conducted in accordance with Rawlsian principles; moreover, I claim that the genetic enhancement has the potential to eliminate inequalities by improving people's cognitive abilities which will better their overall well-being. My general argument is a manifestation of the faith in human reason; it is an attempt to illustrate more optimistic view on the human enhancement which does not have to be idealistic and theoretical if truly democratic societies decide to cooperate for the sake of future generations.

## Work Cited

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