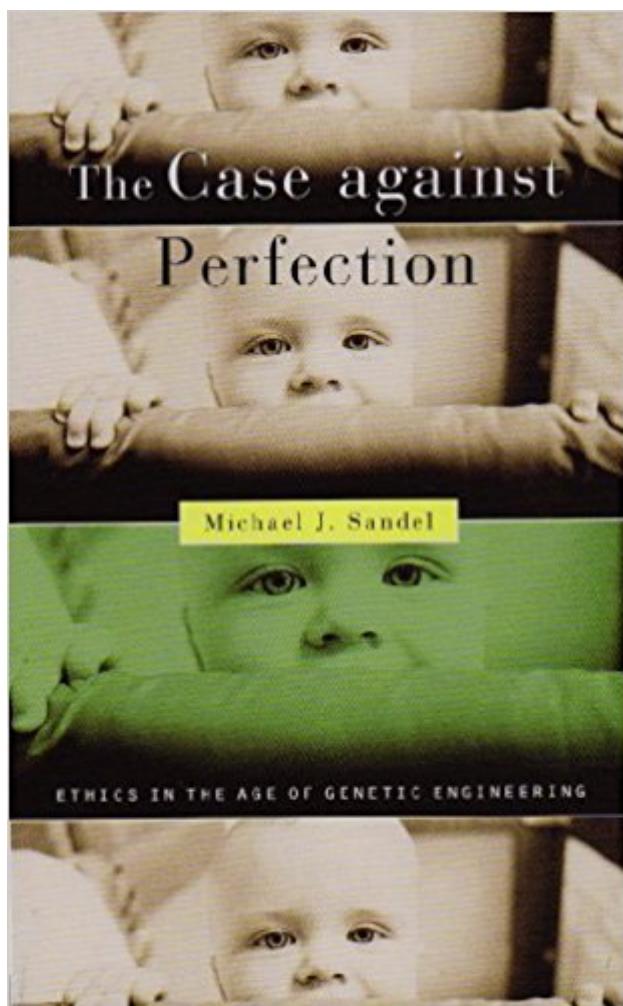


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The Case Against Perfection: Ethics In The Age Of Genetic Engineering



Synopsis

Breakthroughs in genetics present us with a promise and a predicament. The promise is that we will soon be able to treat and prevent a host of debilitating diseases. The predicament is that our newfound genetic knowledge may enable us to manipulate our nature—*to enhance our genetic traits and those of our children*. Although most people find at least some forms of genetic engineering disquieting, it is not easy to articulate why. What is wrong with re-engineering our nature? *The Case against Perfection* explores these and other moral quandaries connected with the quest to perfect ourselves and our children. Michael Sandel argues that the pursuit of perfection is flawed for reasons that go beyond safety and fairness. The drive to enhance human nature through genetic technologies is objectionable because it represents a bid for mastery and dominion that fails to appreciate the gifted character of human powers and achievements. Carrying us beyond familiar terms of political discourse, this book contends that the genetic revolution will change the way philosophers discuss ethics and will force spiritual questions back onto the political agenda. In order to grapple with the ethics of enhancement, we need to confront questions largely lost from view in the modern world. Since these questions verge on theology, modern philosophers and political theorists tend to shrink from them. But our new powers of biotechnology make these questions unavoidable. Addressing them is the task of this book, by one of America's preeminent moral and political thinkers.

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Customer Reviews

Our quest to create the perfect athlete or the perfect child reflects our drive for mastery and domination over life, says Sandel, a Harvard professor of government and a former member of the President's Council on Bioethics. In this evenhanded little book, which grew out of an essay in the Atlantic, Sandel says this quest endangers the view of human life as a gift. Allowing genetic engineering to erode our appreciation for natural gifts and talents, Sandel says, will affect how we understand humility, responsibility and solidarity; it deprives parents of "the humility and enlarged human sympathies that an openness to the unbidden can cultivate." (The discussion of perfect children also gives Sandel an opportunity to rag on hyperparenting, a trend he sees as a similar expression of parents' desire for dominion.). In addition, if we all possess varying gifts and talents, then as part of our solidarity with others in our society we should share our gifts with those who lack comparable ones. Although Sandel's book treads over heavily traveled territory, it turns in a different direction from the standard arguments that the problem with bioengineering is that it deprives individuals of autonomy. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Why does improving our physical and mental capabilities through genetic engineering give us pause? Sandel acknowledges religious positions on that question but, striving for universality, sticks to secular philosophy to answer it. He bases his argument on the principle that life is a gift, which cannot be scientifically proven but which very nearly all people understand and appreciate. It isn't difficult to accept genetic engineering to heal the effects of disease and disability, but enhancing the capabilities of healthy persons or of children even before conception comes to seem increasingly iffy as Sandel expands on the problems of the souped-up athlete and the so-called designer child. Against the argument that individuals and responsible parents have the right to seek maximal capability for themselves and their offspring, Sandel poses the specter of overweening mastery of nature, which historically has led to such ill effects as environmental degradation and genocide. An illuminating ethical analysis of stem-cell research concludes this stellar work of public philosophy. Ray OlsonCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Sandel is a great philosopher, He challenges the notions and in the same instance make you come up with your own 'morals' when it comes to genetic engineering. I had to buy this book for a course but read it 4 times since.

This review is about the kindle edition. Sandel points in plain and simple language the flaws one finds in a doctrine that allows whatever means necessary to obtain one chosen end. The arbitrary distribution of healthy and talents, the book argues, cannot be completely overruled by human agency. Its a well written essay. The kindle book lacks some important features. One must navigate to the end of the book, for example, in order to read the footnotes.

The book was an interesting read, but frustrating. There was a genetic determinism about the discussion that made the author's stand feel naive. Clearly the variation in many human features are constrained to a particular range by genetics, but this does not mean that any individual can be engineered to guarantee the development of a particular trait. Even extremely pro-genes books like *The Nurture Assumption* leave an important role for environment in human development (Harris just doesn't think parents are a particularly influential part of that environment). The gift argument is repeated throughout, but not supported very well. Sandel also discusses genetic modifications as arms races, but misses the fact that the "improvement" of human characteristics need not entail an arms race or a zero sum game. There are traits that have a value that is non-competitive. If research has found that people with a happiness score of 8-9 on a scale of 1-10 succeed most in life, it is correct to note that success in many fields is competitive. Yet, the feeling of happiness and enjoyment of life is not a zero sum game. Every human can enjoy this at the same time. If genetic engineering made us all 8-9 on the happiness scale, we would all benefit individually in our quality of life, though we would only be keeping pace with regards to competitive advantage. Again, Sandel misses this nuance and his discussions suffer from it. The part of the book I felt was worth reading was the section regarding hyper-parenting. This was a point neglected in other books I have read on the subject, such as Agar's and Glover's. Nevertheless, the other books are far superior discussions of the subject with more exhaustive and nuanced discussions of genetic engineering. I would advise against reading only this book when reading on this subject. This book should be read to offer another perspective after reading a more well rounded discussion like Glover's. As with any of the books I mention in this review, you should understand views on the role of genetics in development before reading the books. Don't expect the books to teach those details, though Agar's does contain good discussions regarding the fallacy of genetic determinism.

This book makes you think about what's natural about us and other living organisms. Much is based simply on what you believe is best and therefore it comes closer to religion. That's an interesting point; Is there a link between such a belief system and religion? If so, what is it? Good question for

atheists as well as religious people.

At times, this book reads like a prolegomena to Sandel's "Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do" in terms of argument and some of the examples he gives to illustrate his moral reasoning, but "The Case..." is worth reading anyway - especially for those who are interested in bioethics within a broader context of Aristotelian reasoning.

I bought this book as a required text for a class. Came in a good quality and was happy with services.

Pretty great, thought challenging read.

Good, and well organized. So well organized that I'll use his organization to refute him point by point.

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