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Recitation 08: From Eugenics to Genetic Engineering

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2. Eugenics

Many eugenics policies begin from the attractive premise that humans should be made as well off as possible. Ought humans be made as well off as possible?

Consider some example policies and practices [see page 2]. Some of these seem reasonable, others do not. Can we draw a principled line between the reasonable ones and the unreasonable ones?

Is there a moral difference between positive eugenics and negative eugenics?

What do you think of the Cyprus case?

Are slippery slope fears about eugenics justified?

3. Genetic engineering and medical genetics

Ought genetic engineering be regulated? How so?

Ought we pursue gene therapy and medical genetics? Does this set a dangerous precedent?

What sorts of practices are justified from a resources allocation perspective?

What do attitudes about gene therapy imply about people currently living with genetic disabilities?

Are slippery slope fears about genetic engineering justified?

Do scientists have any special obligations when it comes to genetic engineering research?

Is there a relevant (moral) difference between current genetic engineering and historical selective breeding?

Some policies and practices to consider and to evaluate:

- Banning smoking in various public buildings.
- Banning transfats in New York city.
- Banning non-diet soda.
- Sin taxes (taxes on cigarettes, *etc.*)
- Mandating healthy school lunches.
- Mandating vaccinations.
- Allowing individuals to mate with whomever they please.
- Allowing siblings to mate.
- Allowing people with genetic diseases to mate.
- Terminating fetuses that will develop painful diseases.
- Terminating fetuses that will develop into blind people.
- Terminating fetuses that will develop brown eyes.
- Limiting families to one child.
- Giving tax incentives for marriages.
- Giving tax incentives for having children.
- Merit-based college scholarships.
- Athletics scholarships for college.
- P.E. requirements for college graduation.
- A swimming test for college graduation.