SANDEL: AGAINST PERFECTION

FIRST: Five Rejected Arguments

1. Autonomy Argument:
   1) Reproductive cloning (or genetic selection) would point children toward particular life choices.
   2) To point children toward particular choices undermines their freedom or autonomy.
   3) It is wrong to undermine children’s freedom or autonomy.
   4) Cloning (genetic selection) is wrong.

   Sandel: 1) Children’s choices aren’t unconstrained in any case, and some constraints are clearly permissible (Ex: music lessons). 2) This objection doesn’t explain our objection to the use of these technologies by individuals who choose them for themselves.

2. Fairness Argument:
   1) Enhanced people (ex: Athletes) would have an advantage over the un-enhanced.
   2) It is unfair for people to have such an advantage.
   3) Enhancement is unfair.

   Sandel: Some people already have genetic advantages over others, in particular areas, and this is not regarded as unfair. (Argument too quick?)

3. Argument from Fair Access:
   1) Genetic enhancement could create separate classes of humans, the unenhanced and the enhanced.
   2) Where access to such advantages is not fair and equal, or where some have no access by no fault of their own, the resultant situation will be unfair.
   3) Genetic enhancement (in the absence of equal opportunity for enhancement) is unfair.

4. Argument from Collective Self-Defeat:
   1) People want enhancements because they provide a positional advantage.
   2) If everyone pursues such a positional advantage, no one gets it (self defeat)
   3) So (i) it is wrong/pointless to pursue enhancement for positional advantage? (ii) it is legitimate to restrict people’s access to enhancement technologies because the result is self-defeating?

What’s the relevant conclusion here?

Responses:
   1) Aren’t some of the things people might pursue through genetic enhancement good for their own sakes?
   2) Is this argument consistent with the fairness and fair access arguments?
5. Humanity Argument:
1) Genetic enhancements undermine our humanity, or our commitment to humanity.
2) It is wrong to undermine our humanity/commitment to humanity.
3) Genetic enhancements are wrong.

SANDER’S FAVORED ARGUMENTS: Can Sandel’s arguments be represented clearly in standard form, premises distinguished and articulated separately from the conclusion?

“... removing the coercion does not vindicate eugenics. The problem with eugenics and genetic engineering is that they represent the one-sided triumph of willfulness over giftedness, of dominion over reverence, of molding over beholding.”

“One of the blessings of seeing ourselves as creatures of nature, God, or fortune is that we are not wholly responsible for the way we are. The more we become masters of our genetic endowments, the greater the burden we bear for the talents we have and the way we perform. Today when a basketball player misses a rebound, his coach can blame him for being out of position. Tomorrow the coach may blame him for being too short. Even now the use of performance-enhancing drugs in professional sports is subtly transforming the expectations players have for one another; on some teams players who take the field free from amphetamines or other stimulants are criticized for "playing naked." The bigger danger, admittedly more speculative, is that genetic enhancement, if routinely practiced, would make it harder to foster the moral sentiments that social solidarity requires.”

“Why, after all, do the successful owe anything to the least-advantaged members of society? The best answer to this question leans heavily on the notion of giftedness. The natural talents that enable the successful to flourish are not their own doing but, rather, their good fortune — a result of the genetic lottery. If our genetic endowments are gifts, rather than achievements for which we can claim credit, it is a mistake and a conceit to assume that we are entitled to the full measure of the bounty they reap in a market economy. We therefore have an obligation to share this bounty with those who, through no fault of their own, lack comparable gifts.”

“A lively sense of the contingency of our gifts — a consciousness that none of us is wholly responsible for his or her success — saves a meritocratic society from sliding into the smug assumption that the rich are rich because they are more deserving than the poor. Without this, the successful would become even more likely than they are now to view themselves as self-made and self-sufficient, and hence wholly responsible for their success. Those at the bottom of society would be viewed not as disadvantaged, and thus worthy of a measure of compensation, but as simply unfit, and thus worthy of eugenic repair.”

“The deeper danger is that they [these technologies] represent a kind of hyperagency—a Promethean aspiration to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy our desires. The problem is not the drift to mechanism but the drive to mastery. And what the drive to mastery misses and may even destroy is an appreciation of the gifted character of human powers and achievements.”
Sandel urges that we are better off when we don't regard ourselves as wholly responsible for the way we are. While one might now be reprimanded for missing a rebound, he says, in the future one might be reprimanded for being too short. **Can this argument survive critical evaluation?** Is it plausible to think that people might be held responsible (and criticized) for the fact that they have not opted for genetic enhancements?

**Critical evaluation**? We need to look at the basis and motivational foundation of our sense that those who are worse off deserve aid. Under what circumstances would enhancement technologies undermine human solidarity?
Against Procreation: Is existence a benefit? Is it Wrong to have Children?

“Life is a gamble at terrible odds—if it were a bet, you wouldn’t take it.”
-Tom Stoppard, *Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.*

**The Anti-Natalist Objection:** Suppose we accept that we (i) have a duty not to conceive a child if we could reliably foresee that it will be miserable, but (ii) we have no duty to conceive a child even if we could be sure that it will be very happy.

Having children always involves imposing on them some risk that they will not be happy: "It will be seen immediately that the act "do not produce the child" dominates the act "produce the child" because it has equally good consequences as the other act in one case [if the child is or would have been happy], and better consequences in the other [if the child is or would have been unhappy]. So it is to be preferred to the other act as long as we cannot exclude with certainty the possibility that the child will be more or less unhappy; and we never can.” -Herman Vetter, 1971


**Other Considerations:**
1) Perhaps the well being of one’s child is not an independent reason to have children, but there may sometimes be other compelling reasons (what reasons would they be?) that would support our right to have children.
2) Even if one accepted that there is an obligation not to have children, one might still regard people as having a right that others not interfere with reproductive choices. (right of procreative liberty.)

**Person affecting principles:**
(1) While it’s good to make people happy, we may be indifferent about making happy people. (Jan Narveson)
(2) Nothing is bad unless there is someone for whom it is bad. (Derek Parfit?)
(3) Morality involves only what would be good or bad for people who will be better or worse off. (Jonathan Bennett?)
(4) All and only actual people fall within the scope of morality. (David Heyd?)
(5) Harms to persons must always be harms to some person.
(6) Those who will suffer a harm if it is not prevented and those who will not suffer it if it is prevented must be the same people.
(7) It’s good if unhappiness lacks a person, but not bad if happiness lacks a person. (Bennett)
(8) The concept of harm is comparative, based on what would have happened otherwise. (Feinberg’s counterfactual condition)
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**Can this argument survive critical evaluation?** Is it plausible to think that people might be held responsible (and criticized) for the fact that they have not opted for genetic enhancements?

Sandel urges that the view that we have obligations to the worse off essentially employs the idea that they are not responsible, or not wholly responsible for their predicament. Genetic enhancement technologies could undermine this sense.

**Critical evaluation?** We need to look at the basis and motivational foundation of our sense that those who are worse off deserve aid. Under what circumstances would enhancement technologies undermine human solidarity?