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Genetics

Should society limit the advances in gene research?

PRO



Lori Saddler

Genetics is a topic that has intrigued and frightened generations of science fiction readers and one whose potential was first

uncovered by scientists nearly 20 years ago. Since the establishment of the many subfields of genetics, the scientific community has posed many ethical questions on society. Today, our knowledge of human genes has increased tremendously, but the ethical battle grows more and more complex as the study of genetics incorporates larger aspects of our lives.

Although the study of genetics has contributed much to the fields of science and medicine, the numerous negative ethical aspects and potential dangers of genetics outweigh its potential benefits.

The most recent controversy centers on the use of genetics to treat and prevent diseases. This "gene therapy" was the topic of discussion in a recent conference at Houston's Texas Medical Center.

Gene therapy was first used by Dr. W. French Anderson less than two years ago in two children who were born without an enzyme that is essential to development of the human immune system. His patients received injections of corrected white blood cells to replace their own deficient cells. Since the injected cells have a limited life-span, the children must undergo repeated treatments about every 90 days.

To date, the children's therapy seems to be going well, but it also raises a new crop of philosophical questions to the public. These questions are likely to explode during the next few decades as genetic manipulation becomes the common choice of therapy for more and more diseases.

Incorporating genetics into medicine could allow couples to know if their newborn or even if their unborn children have any genetically treatable diseases, but using genetics to diagnose or treat common ailments such as high cholesterol or cancer could leave room for manipulation by insurance companies or health care providers who might deny coverage to certain individuals based on their genetic makeup.

These possibilities raise the question of where to draw the line on individual privacy. If parents can find out about the genetic makeup of their children before they are born, who else will have access to this information? And later on down the road, who can say whether the government will force all pregnant women to have genetic tests done on their unborn fetuses.

When doctors are able to use genetics to predict and correct diseases, who will get the right to determine what the definition of a disease is? Some people may only want genetics to be used in treating terminal illnesses while others may consider the traits of lefthandedness or shortness to be undesirable, therefore insisting on gene therapy to alter these conditions. The latter group brings to mind an image close to that of eugenics in which genetics could be used to create a "master human race" like that of Huxley's "Brave New World".

Even with the medical benefits in hand, the use of genetics in medicine opens up a Pandora's box that is much too dangerous to be opened by our society.

We must realize that the value of privacy and of humanity exceeds by far the short term benefits for the field of medicine.

Saddler is a sophomore psychology major

CON



Brian Boney

As if in some Star Trek episode, humans are attaining the ability to alter the very building blocks of their being.

The possibilities are endless. Cancer, AIDS and birth defects all could be cured by the advances now being made in genetics. It's possible in the not-too-distant future that people no longer will have to worry about human defects that cause them to bear the brunt of scorn and ridicule. We could the pain suffered by millions.

Yet some would deny these people that opportunity because genetic research conflicts with their narrow views of ethics or religion.

The ethics we can work out as the needs arise. There is no need to derail the science of genetics because we have no ethical answers now.

Of course the ethical questions are important.

Should women be forced to undergo treatment to prevent children who might be born gay?

Should couples be allowed to engineer the appearance of their children?

Should criminals be altered to deter their anti-social ways?

All of these and more questions rate serious discussion.

But without knowing the specifics of each genetic solution, society cannot determine the proper course of action. We cannot answer a question that hasn't been written. That's no reason to stop genetic research.

Perhaps the hardest fight, though, will be that against religion.

The question of "curing" homosexuality is the perfect example.

If science eventually proves that homosexuality is genetic, as I believe, then Christian dogma dictates that the unborn child must be altered, or else the parents would be sinners.

But what if the parents chose to have a homosexual child and altered it accordingly? The church would be forced into preventing the operation.

The simple fact of mankind altering "God's creation," a child, strikes fear in religious leaders. They can be expected to fight genetic research tooth and nail.

The ethical debate will and should continue.

But to stop research before the answers have been found is to deny millions in the future of treatments that could greatly improve their lives. It is very easy for those of us who are normal height, with no handicaps or diseases to point at those who do and tell them to accept their lot in life.

Would we be so quick to defend that position if we were forced to live life in a wheelchair, or to take insulin, or to undergo continual operations?

The answers to many of mankind's plagues are out there, waiting for us to find them. We cannot let our shortsightedness destroy the possible reality that could be: a race of people who have no physical flaws or ailments.

Some science fiction theories would have believe that a race such as this would be inherently evil. They say that humans would lose their humanity. We would be too close to perfection.

Is that so bad, though?

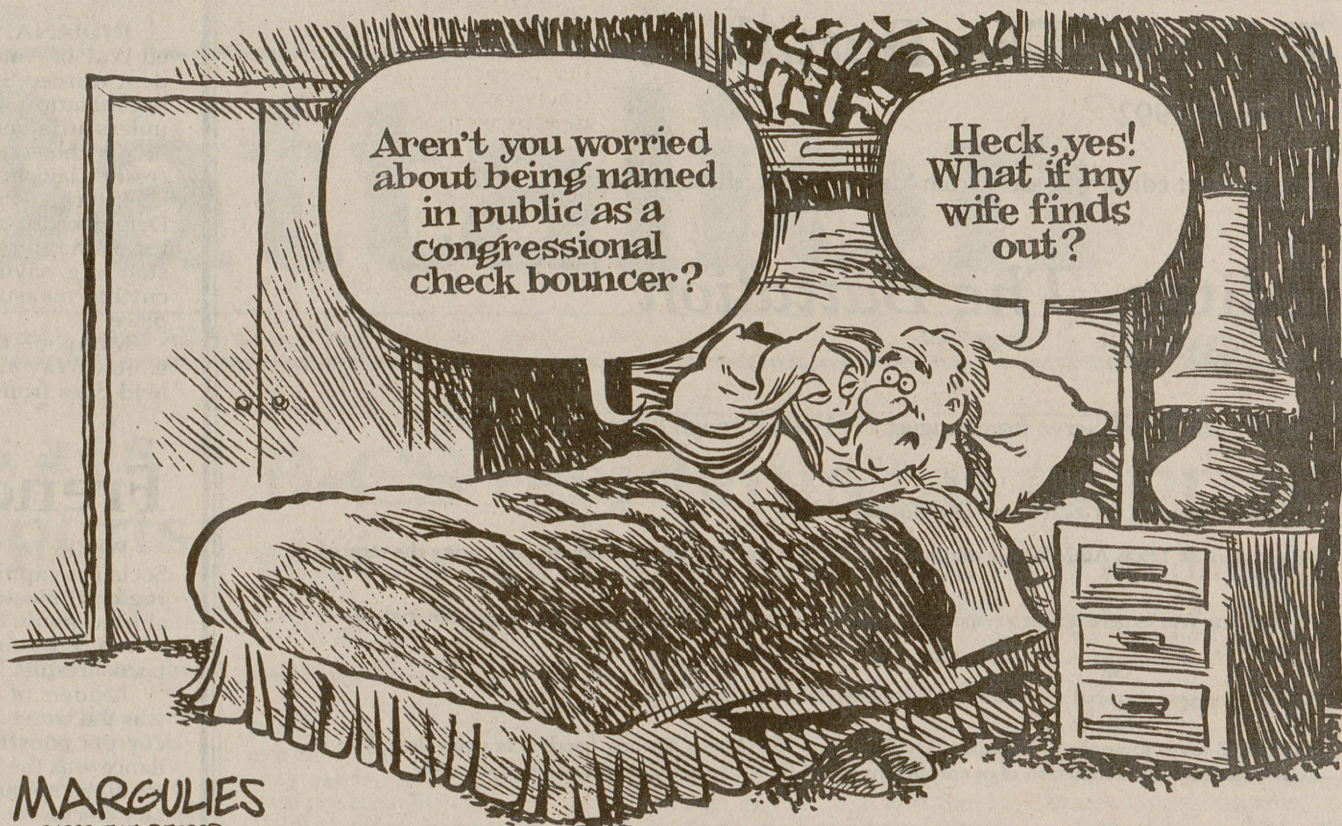
Just as we have a responsibility to each other to relieve the suffering that disease and other calamities cause, we have a responsibility to the future to lay the groundwork now that could mean better lives for upcoming generations.

Genetic research must continue.

The benefits mankind could realize far outweigh the possible mistakes we could make.

It is our nature to move forward, not backward.

Boney is a senior education certification major



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NEW JERSEY

Kitegate

Check-bouncing excuses insult the intelligence of constituents

I thought I was going to write a serious column about life or something this week, but we the people caught Congress with its hand in the proverbial cookie jar again.

So what did our esteemed and honored Congress do now? For those of you just getting over Spring Break-related hangovers, I'll sum it up.

Congress has its own bank, a full-service bank with checking accounts for each representative. Representatives can have their exorbitant paychecks conveniently deposited directly to these accounts, and may then use checks to withdraw their hard-earned pay. This is very similar to the account you probably have right now, except congressmen have significantly more money in their accounts.



Jon DeShazo

The House bank allows Congressmen to overdraw their accounts for any amount anytime they choose. The process is called 'kiting,' since the checks are paid by the bank and the debt is left floating in a fiscal nether world until the overdraft is rectified. There is no penalty for this behavior at the House Bank; in other parts of America, overdrafts can result in jail time.

But the House bank does not operate by the normal rules of banking. This should be obvious, of course, since it's run for the benefit of Congress—the same organization that has exempted itself from many of the laws it has forced upon the rest of us, such as the latest civil rights act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Congress has created for itself and its own posterity a kind of Never-Never land in which it may suspend any

laws or standards of ethics it pleases.

Such behavior is nothing new for the House of Representatives, and this "Kitegate" scandal would probably not grace my byline had some of the congressional koters used better excuses for their actions.

Denial is an overused excuse in the scandal. Arkansas congressman Tommy Robinson tops the kiting list by overdrawing 996 times. However, even in the face of things like facts or bank records, Mr. Robinson denies that he ever overdraw his account. New Yorker Robert Mrazek drew 972 overdrafts, and was overdrawn for 23 consecutive months. He, too, claims not a single overdraft in his account.

Some representatives used a "moral high ground" approach to justify their fiscal responsibilities. Californian Robert Dorman bounced a check that bought a small cave dedicated to the Virgin Mary for his backyard.

Charles Hatcher from Georgia holds 819 bad checks, and was overdrawn for 35 months. "I haven't been a high liver, I don't think," Hatcher said. "But I've had living expenses and family expenses."

New Yorker Susan Molinari made a ringing endorsement for Congress' intellectual level when she commented on her six bad checks: "I'm a dope, not a crook."

Tim Penny from Minnesota blames his overdrafts on his office manager. And besides, he said, two of his three bounced checks were to a Christian youth group and a corn-grower's association, so at least they were for good causes.

"I feel that I was victimized," said F. James Sensenbrenner Jr., from Wisconsin. He claims the House bank never told him of his 13 overdrafts amounting to \$50,000. Apparently he never thought of scrutinizing his bank statements.

Mary Rose Oakar of Ohio claims she thought she had to deposit her paycheck in a House Bank account

because, "They didn't tell us there was another way to get your check." The 15-year House veteran claims she never realized she could deposit her paycheck anywhere she chose. Oakar admitted to six overdrafts; current records show 217. Oakar, by the way, sits on the House Administration Committee, which controls the House Bank. So much for "Congressional oversight."

I have no trouble accepting stupid exploits of the US. Congress, but I do not appreciate members of Congress treating the rest of us like illiterate morons. These excuses are pathetic. Every representative has his own speech writer. These writers should be creative enough to make up acceptable excuses for the public's consumption, especially since you pay for the guys. Even honesty would be a nice change of pace.

"Yeah, I kited 632 checks worth \$500,000. Hey, I'm a 12-term incumbent, and I don't have to talk to repulsive, insignificant constituents like you! Now get out; I've got an appointment with my federally funded masseuse."

Or, "I'm a Kennedy. I can do anything I want."

Kitegate is more proof that Congress is unwilling to police itself. We, the voting public, cannot impose rules on the House and Senate, but we can still use two means of ridding our government of this corruption. We can force through term limitations, or we can vote them all out of office. Illinois voters kicked out several House members in last week's primaries there. The rest of the country has November to cast a pink slip.

Throw the bums out first. Then we can set up term limits to keep the bums out.

DeShazo is a junior electrical engineering major

Mail Call

Aggie hoops deserve pride

This past academic year Texas A&M has been slammed and slammed again by not only the local media but the national media as well. From the Bryan-College Station Eagle to the New York Times and from KBTX to a Current Affair, the Aggies have repeatedly been the recipients of bad press and biased reporting which has tarnished our reputation nationwide.

As if this is not enough, Texas A&M has once again become the brunt of the media. Our basketball team was placed on the killfloor of the Erwin Center for Texas to massacre on national TV. All this for the sake of making the Texas basketball program look better. Not once during the whole coverage was it stressed that the Aggies had almost entirely walk-on

team as opposed to Texas' scholarship athletes. The whole "horns-fest" was positively disgraceful. Jeers to ABC.

Despite all of this, I remain proud of our basketball program. There were some great moments this year, foreshadowing what is to come in the near future. The team that played Sunday is not the same team that started the season against Marathon Oil. I applaud all of you on your determination not to give up, especially you, Coach Barone. Last semester when your new basketball program was slapped with NCAA sanctions that you and your players had nothing to do with, you could have left but you stayed. Thank you for not giving up on us. Despite what the majority of the nation is saying, Aggies are pretty good people and I hope you and your players know that the student body is proud of you as well as the entire basketball program.

Thanks for a great season. Although it wasn't winning, it was certainly one

of which to be proud.

Gretchen E. Kelly
Class of '92

Have an opinion? Express it!

The Battalion is interested in hearing from its readers. All letters to the editor are welcome.

Letters must be signed and must include classification, address and a daytime phone number for verification purposes. Anonymous letters will not be published.

The Battalion reserves the right to edit all letters for length, style and accuracy. There is no guarantee that letters will appear.

Letters may be brought to 013 Reed McDonald, sent to Campus Mail Stop 1111 or can be faxed to 845-2647.