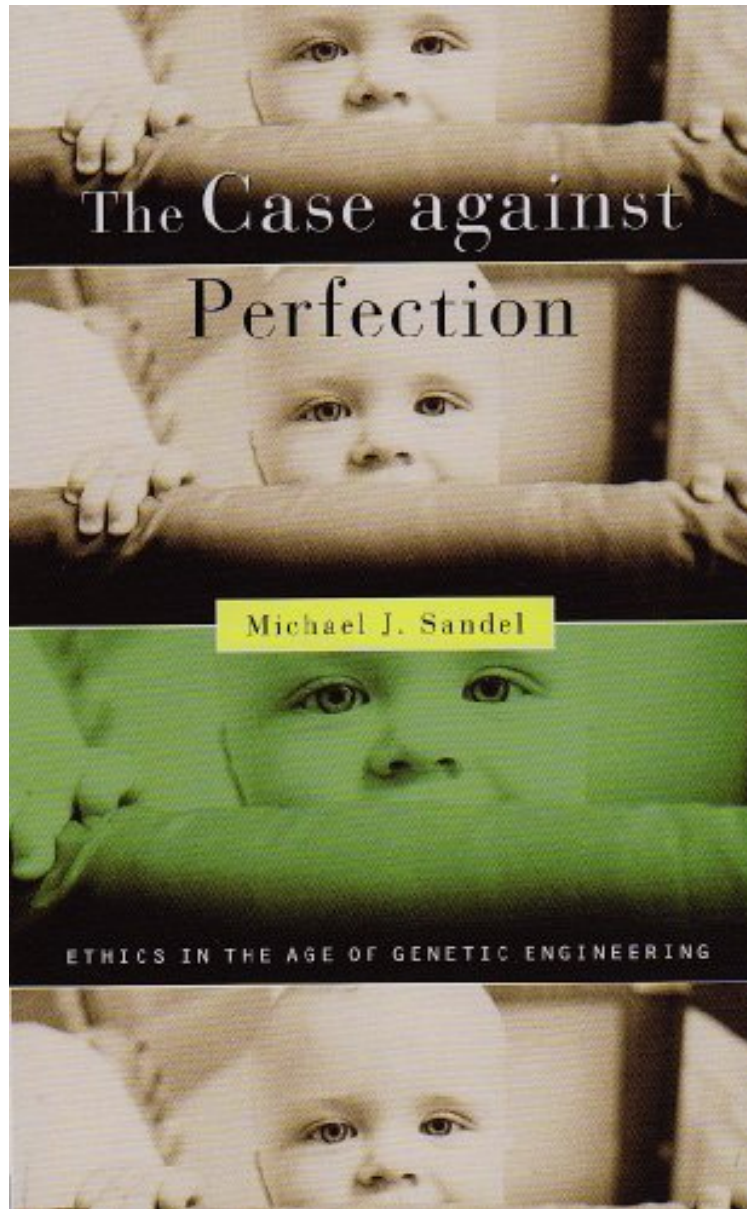


(Pdf free) The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering

## The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering

*Michael J. Sandel*

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**Michael J. Sandel : The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great read. By Ash 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. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Means Matter By Marcus 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 overrode 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. 17 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Interesting, not as insightful as others By David J. Moreau 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 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.

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 Americas preeminent moral and political thinkers.

From Publishers Weekly 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. From Booklist 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 Olson Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved Sandel explores a paramount question of our era: how to extend the power and promise of biomedical science to overcome debility without compromising our humanity. His arguments are acute and penetrating, melding sound logic with compassion. We emerge from this book feeling edified and inspired. (Jerome Groopman, Harvard Medical School, author of *How Doctors Think*) We live in a world, says Michael Sandel, where "science moves faster than moral understanding." But thanks to Sandel, moral understanding is catching up. Cloning, stem cell research, performance-enhancing drugs, pills that make you stronger or taller: if some scientific development bothers you, but you can't explain why, Michael Sandel will help you to figure out why you're troubled. And then he'll tell you whether you should be. (Michael Kinsley) In this short and provocative treatise, Sandel, who is professor of government at Harvard and a member of the President's Council on Bioethics, takes on the question of why certain kinds of newly available genetic technologies make us uneasy...[his] book reminds us that the proper starting point for bioethics is not, "what should we do?" but rather, "what kind of society do we want?" And "what kind of people are we?" (Faith McLellan *The Scientist* 2007-04-01) The Case against Perfection by Michael Sandel is a brief, concise, and dazzling argument by one of America's foremost moral and political thinkers that brings you up to speed on the core ethical issues informing current debates about genetic engineering and stem cell research. (Gabriel Gbadamosi BBC Radio) In the future, genetic manipulation of embryos is expected to have the potential to go beyond the treatment of diseases to improvements: children who are taller, more athletic, and have higher IQs... In *The Case against Perfection*, Michael Sandel argues that the unease many people feel about such manipulations have a basis in reason... This beautifully crafted little book... quickly and clearly lays out the key issues at stake. (Gregory M. Lamb *Christian Science Monitor*) Given the vast gulf between progressive and conservative thinking, the time is ripe for a philosopher to take on the issues of biotechnology. And in *The Case against Perfection* Harvard's Michael Sandel does just that, attempting to develop a new position on biotechnology, one that, like Sandel himself, is not easily identified as either left or right. A former member of the President's Council on Bioethics, Sandel is uniquely well suited for this task, and to challenge the left to get its bearings on the brave new biology... Sandel poses an important challenge to contemporary progressives who have failed to grasp the importance of the emerging biopolitics. (Jonathan Moreno *Democracy*) Nobody's perfect, and Mr. Sandel's book makes an instructive and engaging case that that nobody should be. (Yuval Levin *New York Sun* 2007-05-16) In a highly readable, wise and little book titled *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*, Michael Sandel argues that parents' quest to create the ideal child reflects a drive for mastery and domination over life. (Douglas Todd *Vancouver Sun* 2007-05-12) An illuminating ethical analysis of stem-cell research concludes this stellar work of public philosophy. (Ray Olson *Booklist* 2007-04-15) [A] graceful and intelligent new book. (Carl Elliott *New England Journal of Medicine* 2007-05-17) [Sandel] makes the compelling case that genetic engineering to gain advantage for ourselves and our children is deeply disempowering, because it turns us away from the communal good, toward self-centered striving. (Anne Harding *The Lancet* 2007-07-28) Anyone who thinks our culture is too competitive and consumer-driven should find that Sandel's diagnosis resonates. He provides not only a warning about the shape of the future, but equally an indictment of--or at least a call to examine--our individual moral lives and our contemporary social values. Those who support the practice of genetic enhancement argue that the technology is not substantially different from other forms of "enhancement" we use to improve our lives and the lives of our children. Sandel agrees, but he does not base his argument on any particular distinction about the means of enhancement; rather he is deeply concerned about the underlying impetus of mastery and dominion. (Debra Greenfield *Bioethics Forum* 2007-08-20) Michael Sandel's dive into the sea of genetic engineering provides a great tasty gulp of contemporary ethical controversy. Quickly read, *The Case Against Perfection* is nonetheless dense with challenging quandaries, loaded with moral puzzles and filled with facts. An inveterate highlighter, I underlined half the book. (John F. Kavanaugh *America* 2007-08-13) This rather small book presents, in very succinct fashion, many of the arguments against proposals to bioengineer human life. Sandel... argues with care and clarity not only against the more extreme cases such as human cloning, but also against the more modest proposals of gene modification. As the title suggests, the arguments are almost exclusively negative, although Sandel's most interesting and creative suggestion is the idea that such human bioengineering will cause human beings to lose the sense of life as a gift, and that this will have a serious morally negative effect upon the entire social structure. (P.A. Streveler *Choice* 2007-09-01) Sandel's arguments ultimately speak to our gut-level qualms about enhancement; and his aim in fact is to give these qualms a coherent moral basis... His book in the end is more a lyrical plea for reverence and humility than a lawyer's watertight "case against."... The ethicist Michael Sandel wants us at least to think about the line [between health and enhancement], however imaginary--and to think about where, in a

hyper-competitive world, re-engineering our natures will ultimately lead. (Michele Pridmore-Brown Times Literary Supplement 2008-04-18) For many years I have been ambivalent about reproductive innovations, from surrogate gestation to preimplantation screening for gender selection. After reading Sandel's exceedingly elegant little book, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*, I could finally put satisfactory names to core values implicit in my hesitation: acceptance and solidarity. I encountered Sandel's book as a participant in the intellectual discourse about parenting. But the book's greatest value to me was its validation of the commitments of solidarity expressed in my volunteer work on behalf of poor mothers and of acceptance implicit in my determination to mother a child with catastrophic mental illness. (Anita L. Allen Chronicle of Higher Education 2008-05-16)