

Gattaca Questions and assignment due at start of class on Mon, Oct 9

SELECT CAREFULLY AND ANSWER ONE OF THE FOLLOWING FOUR QUESTIONS (1, 2, 3, or 4):

USE OF GENETIC PRESELECTION:

1. When Jerome's parents went to a genetics center for a second child, the geneticist stated, "I have taken the liberty of eradicating any potentially prejudicial conditions - premature baldness, myopia, alcoholism and addictive susceptibility, propensity for violence and obesity." The father then asks "We were wondering if we should leave some things to chance." To this the geneticist responds, "You want to give your child the best possible start. Believe me; we have enough imperfection built-in already. Your child doesn't need any additional burdens." Would it be irresponsible for the father to want to leave something to chance?
2. In an outtake to the movie, the geneticist states that for an extra \$5,000 he could give the embryo enhanced musical or mathematical skills – essentially splicing in a gene that was not present on the parents' original DNA. Would musical or mathematical skill be more like physical abilities, which are pretty rigid, or more like moral qualities (prone to pity or violence) which are less rigid?¹
3. Molecular biology scientists have developed a technique that enables parents to select the sex of their future child. This technique simply separates the X carrying sperms from Y carrying sperms and then inseminates females with the preferred sex chromosomes. This procedure is currently banned in some countries except for medical reasons. Potential parents with sex-linked diseases may choose to have a girl, avoiding the possibility of having a boy with hemophilia, for example. Should sex selection for medical and non-medical reasons be available for parents? What do you think are some implications of this technique?²
4. The original screenplay concludes with the following coda: "In a few short years, scientists will have completed the Human Genome Project, the mapping of all the genes that make up a human being. After 4 billion years of evolution by the slow and clumsy method of natural selection, we have now evolved to the point where we can direct our own evolution. If only we had acquired this knowledge sooner, the following people would never have been born:" It continues listing famous people and their illnesses, such as Stephen Hawking who has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's Disease). A version of this coda was in fact filmed, but deleted from the final movie. How would this argument differ from the following: couples should have as many children as physically possible since limiting births would mean that we wouldn't bring into existence valuable people?³

¹ from Philosophical Films, University of Texas at Martin
<http://www.philfilms.utm.edu/1/gattaca.htm>

² from Advanced Molecular Biology Laboratory, University of British Columbia, Canada
<http://bioteach.ubc.ca/TeachingResources/Bioethics/GattacaActivities.pdf>

³ from Philosophical Films, University of Texas at Martin

Gattaca Genetics Assignment Answers

John Michels (Journalist)



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