

The CRISPR Dilemma: A Philosophical Analysis of Michael Sandel's Argument Against Genetic Engineering

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Introduction

CRISPR is an acronym for "clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats" which is essentially the basis that allows us to edit human genomes. The most common analogy for how exactly it works is finding, copying and pasting piece of text in a word document. Scientists first find the deficient gene that causes inherited and various "incurable" diseases. They then cut out the section which is deficient in order to replace it with a new section that functions correctly. Scientists have already successfully edited the genes of mice and a human embryo with this technology. No doubt, CRISPR technology has the potential to launch the world into a new age of medicine in which we can cure diseases that we previously considered "incurable." However, many still find genetic engineering such as CRISPR morally dubious. Michael Sandel claims that genetic engineering will make us lose touch with our humanity because we lose appreciation of life as a gift. The purpose of my research is to determine if Sandel's argument against genetic engineering is philosophically sound. In doing this research, I hope that my it not only contributes to the ongoing debate over the morals of CRISPR, but also inspire others to develop their own arguments and further contribute to the question of whether CRISPR and genetic engineering are morally right or wrong.



Methodology

To analyze the argument that Michael Sandel poses in his book, "*The Case Against Perfection*," I first determined the main premises in his argument against genetic engineering. Then, I examined each premise to test for its validity. I then determined how each premise supported his final conclusion that genetic engineering is morally wrong. After that, I found his most problematic premise and closely examined it to determine what argument I could develop in order to refute it. Finally, I provided my own evidence to refute his argument that we lose appreciation for life as a gift through hyper-agency.



Results

After conducting my research and analyzing Sandel's argument, I found that his most problematic premise was that in which he defines life as a gift. Because Sandel uses a false premise, his argument is not sound because not all of his premises are true. This premise implies that the singularity and rarity of a gift is what gives it value.

Following this premise, Sandel's argument further implies that the value of life depends solely on its rarity and the fact that it is able to exist. This leads the reader to conclude that Sandel argues that our lives are only valuable because we exist. However, I argue against this a life in which we merely exist is not a life that is commonly thought of as worthy of appreciation. Rather life is valuable not because it is a gift, but because of the capability to use life and thrive in it. Therefore, Sandel's concept of hyper-agency and our ability to make biotechnological advancements is not what makes us lose appreciation for life. Rather, it is in viewing life as merely a rare gift, a stroke of luck or chance, that we lose appreciation for it. Thus, hyper-agency will not make us inhumane or lose morality through lack of appreciation for life



Argument Analysis

- Sandel argues against genetic engineering because it gives us "hyper-agency" (too much power and control)
- Hyper-agency makes us lose appreciation for life as a gift
- Defining life as a gift implies that its value lies in its singularity, rarity, and the fact that it overcame the slim chances of existence
- Thus, Sandel falsely argues that a life is only valuable because it merely exists.
- I argue that a life in which the main purpose is to merely exist is not a life many would consider worthy of appreciation
- There is more to life than simply existing, thus life is valuable not because it is a gift, but because it gives us the capability to thrive.
- Hyper-agency and our ability to advance does not make us lose appreciation for life, rather it makes us appreciate life more

Conclusions

To conclude, Michael Sandel's argument against genetic engineering is not philosophically sound because his premise that life is less appreciated when defined as a gift is false. This proves that his argument is unsound because hyper-agency does not cause us to appreciate life any less. In fact, it makes us appreciate life more by allowing us to give it meaning and purpose. Furthermore, the value of life should not be measured solely by the idea that it is a gift.

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