

The goodness of fragility: On the prospect of genetic technologies aimed at the enhancement of human capacities.

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## **The Goodness of Fragility: On the Prospect of Genetic Technologies Aimed at the Enhancement of Human Capacities**

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### Abstract

Beginning with the assumptions that genetic technology will make possible the enhancement of some significant human capacities and that our society will have self-evident reasons to pursue such enhancements, this essay suggests less evident reasons to proceed with extreme caution. The essay asks: Will we, in our attempts to enhance humans by reducing their subjection to chance and change, inadvertently impoverish them? It explores how technologies aimed at enhancement might affect the good

that is our experience of some forms of the beautiful and the excellent, the good that is relationships of care, and the good that is diversity across the life span. In the end, it speculates about the fundamental philosophical difference that underlies the disagreement between those who would tend to embrace a project to enhance human capacities and those who would tend to criticize such a project.

*Erik Parens*

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## The Goodness of Fragility: On the Prospect of Genetic Technologies Aimed at the Enhancement of Human Capacities

**ABSTRACT.** Beginning with the assumptions that genetic technology will make possible the enhancement of some significant human capacities and that our society will have self-evident reasons to pursue such enhancements, this essay suggests less evident reasons to proceed with extreme caution. The essay asks: Will we, in our attempts to enhance humans by reducing their subjection to chance and change, inadvertently impoverish them? It explores how technologies aimed at enhancement might affect the good that is our experience of some forms of the beautiful and the excellent, the good that is relationships of care, and the good that is diversity across the life span. In the end, it speculates about the fundamental philosophical difference that underlies the disagreement between those who would tend to embrace a project to enhance human capacities and those who would tend to criticize such a project.

**C**URRENTLY, GENETIC TECHNOLOGY cannot be used to significantly enhance human capacities. Although, for instance, genetically engineered bovine somatotropin (BST) is now used to enhance the milk production of cows, no one suggests an analogous enhancement of humans. And while human growth hormone (hGH) has been administered to enhance the stature of children who are not hGH deficient, it is not clear whether the procedure has worked (White 1993).

Yet if it is true that humans cannot now significantly enhance their capacities with genetic technology, it is also true that they always have sought to enhance their capacities with whatever means have been available. For example, we enhance our intellectual capacities with education, our bodily capacities with exercise, and our capacity to attract sexual partners with a variety of cosmetic techniques. From this I infer two



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The goodness of fragility: On the prospect of genetic technologies aimed at the enhancement of human capacities, the interpretation of all the observations below suggests that even before measurements are made, the rule of law is inheritable.

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