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Robert C. Baumiller

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Fabricated Man:

The Ethics of Genetic Control

by
Paul Ramsey
Yale University Press, paper 174
pp., \$1.95

Dr. Paul Ramsey is a christian ethician who is willing unashamedly to combine the Science of Ethics with a biblical and theological approach to modern and future problems. It is a rare scholar today who is willing to meet the modern, agnostic or atheist, and not be content to join battle on his ground but rather to insist that faith has an important input which can alter the conclusion.

For those who have been trained in logical progression where the basis for the argument must be a known principle and where the conclusion need not control the terms of the argument, this will be a refreshing book. One need not agree with Ramsey's principles or the conclusions but

he presents a cogent argument and must be attacked in an equally professional way in order to substitute a different set of principles and conclusions. This method of argumentation is almost lost today; debate and logic have given over to charism and intuition. The change was brought home to me some 10 years ago when at a meeting I was publicly accused of being "logical"; an accusation which must end all rational discussion.

Ramsey presents three essays. The first two have been published elsewhere but the third is new. The first essay takes on the Nobel Laureate, H. J. Muller, and his predictions of man's future. Muller's recommendations to use frozen sperm (AID) from 'good

men' (genetically and, therefore, humanistically) is rejected. Essay two confronts Joshua Lederberg, another Nobel Laureate, and rejects his proposal for cloning desirable types. A clonee would be an identical twin (but many years younger) of some good and, therefore, intelligent and humanistic individual. The last piece reviews the previous arguments but is mercifully free of treating the personalities involved. The bases for judging in Ramsey's System are presented, and many of the other possible genetic corrective methods are reviewed and weighed against the principles involved.

There are two levels to be handled in almost every discussion of genetic manipulation. One is the level of the person, e.g. saving an individual from a debilitating disease. The second level is the evolving of mankind and our rational control over our own evolution.

In regard to the personal level Ramsey holds for a God-given dignity. On this premise is built the faith-informed principle that there are far worse things that can befall a man than disease and material death. If one accepts these statements it follows that there may well be actions which man may not take in order to avoid disease and death. Throughout all three essays this basic respect for man as a totality shines through. Ramsey does not believe that any action natural to man should be separated from him. Thus, he objects to the separation of the biological or reproductive from the personal. AID, inovation, cloning, etc.

force this separation and, therefore, are not ethical. So adamant is Dr. Ramsey that he objects to the word *reproduction* since it is mechanistic and in its stead opts for *procreation* as the proper word for describing the human duplicative process. For Ramsey, every human act of intercourse is or should be procreative at least in the intentional order. Sterilization, infertility, contraception does not interfere with this intentional procreative act between husband and wife. Artificial insemination is seen as the procedure which, if accepted by an ethical system, would then in principle allow *any* means of reproduction to be acceptable within that system.

The second level which must be handled in an ethical study of genetic manipulation is the effect on the race and on human evolution. It must be clear to anyone who reads this book that Ramsey believes in the theory of evolution and sees mankind as biologically evolving. Not so clear at first reading is whether he sees man's nature as also evolving as for instance Teilhard understands this. However, a closer reading places Ramsey in the camp of the evolutionists since man is never a dualistically separated body and soul for him but necessarily both. Since soul can never be fully separated from body, one cannot evolve separately.

Men influence the evolution of the human species. Should the influence be rational and how extensively should we control our evolution? Ramsey starts this discussion by reminding us of the

Judeo-Christian eschatology. This tradition has always taught that the human species need not and probably will not continue eternally. Thus, there are worse things that can happen to men than the extinction of mankind. Such an approach is not taken by most modern scientists, who see no greater tragedy than the worldly extinction of intelligent beings. From the agnostic or atheistic point of view then, any procedure which will correct man's downhill, genetic slide to extinction must be taken. Since the basic starting point is different, the argumentation must differ between the two. However, conclusions reached as to the rightness and wrongness of adopting particular means may be the same.

Again and again Ramsey opts for the human expression of physical love as the only allowable procreative input into mankind. To have technology take over the biological reproductive function even if this alone holds promise of saving our species, is unethical according to

Ramsey. It is surprising how someone who might be considered old fashioned in his approach and old fashioned in his defense of traditional values can sound so much like the avant garde of our society. The fringe, who are saying *no* to technology and returning to the natural life, are expressing in their modernity what the establishment-oriented Ramsey defends.

I suggest this book as necessary for anyone engaged in the present controversy on abortion, AID, etc. and as interesting reading for anyone with a concern for life and the consequences of our manipulation of it. Ramsey's style of writing makes for easy reading by anyone who reads *Time* or some such periodical. Some will be antagonized by his style of writing and the manner in which opposing ideas are attacked. The refutation of Muller and Lederberg and others may leave the wrong impression of the contribution and greatness of their lives and their devotion to mankind.

Robert C. Baumiller, S.J.
Assistant Professor of
Obstetrics and Gynecology
And Director of the
Cytogenetics Laboratory,
Georgetown University
Hospital.